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SIMILITUDES,

8c.

I.—LIGHT THE EMBLEM OF GOD.

“This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”
1 John i. 5.—See also Luke ii. 32. John i. 9. 1 Tim. vi. 16.

LIGHT was the first created, and is the purest of all God’s visible works. It has been chosen by God as the emblem of Himself. Its purity is the image of His holiness; its brightness, of His glory and happiness; its usefulness, of His infinite beneficence. What would be the state of the world without light? There could be no beauty, nor order, nor cultivation of any useful arts. Things would soon return to that original chaos when the earth was without form and void, while darkness was upon the face of the deep.¹

We learn thus the state of any soul that is without God. It has no knowledge of the way to happiness and virtue; no inward order and beauty of holiness; nor any real comfort under the troubles of life. The Lord alone can be its light and its salvation.² As light to one who sits in darkness and the shadow of death,³ so is the knowledge of God to the soul of man. Whatever else is looked to for comfort or growth in

¹ Gen. i. 2.

² Ps. xxvii. 1.

³ Isa. ix. 2.

Similitudes used in

virtue, will prove only like the sparks which flash brightly for a short season, and soon go out.¹

And as the eternal God is said to be “light, and in Him is no darkness at all;” so, also, we read of the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is “the true light, that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” So scriptural is the confession of the Church in her Creed:² being “God of God,” He is “Light of Light;” from all eternity begotten of the Father, with whom He is of one substance, power, and eternity.

And thus, also, the children of God are said to be “children of light.”³ Being born of water and of the Holy Ghost,⁴ they are partakers of a Divine nature.⁵ And they are commanded to walk in light, even “in the light of the Lord.”⁶ As God is light without darkness, so Christians, also, are to be “full of light, having no part dark.”⁷ “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin.”⁸

II.—DARKNESS THE EMBLEM OF EVIL.

“Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.” John iii. 19.—See Luke xxii. 53. Acts xxvi. 18. Rom. xiii. 12. 2 Cor. vi. 14.

As light is the emblem of the blessed God, it follows, that darkness is the emblem of evil; and “the power of darkness” signifies the power at present possessed by Satan over the children of disobedience.

¹ Isa. 1. 11.

² Nicene Creed.

³ Luke xvi. 8. Eph. v. 8.

⁴ John iii. 5.

⁵ 2 Pet i. 4.

⁶ Isa. ii. 5.

⁷ Luke xi. 36.

⁸ 1 John i. 6, 7.

“Truly,” says the Preacher, “the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.”¹ Darkness, on the other hand, is uncongenial to us and unpleasing. We feel ourselves helpless in darkness and sigh for light; we cannot exercise our powers, nor enjoy the beauties of creation. In giving us “a lesser light to rule the night,”² and in spangling the heavens with all those glorious constellations which render a star-light night so beautiful, God has consulted our natural repugnance to darkness; and as we feel this natural dislike to darkness, so should sin excite in us the feelings only of repugnance and abhorrence. It is in darkness that the creatures most loathsome as well as most terrible to man come forth, for the most part, from their secret places, as if they shrank from the pure light of day. Works of moral evil, also, shroud themselves under the shades of night, and are called “unfruitful works of darkness.”³ They shrink from being made manifest; and thus the darkness in which they seek concealment, is the emblem of their own loath-someness and baseness.

As “whatever makes manifest is light,”⁴ he who is the prince of darkness would keep the soul in ignorance and error; and our frequent prayer should be, that God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, would shine in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.⁵ And, remembering that as light and darkness cannot exist together, so there can be no concord between God and Satan, or between good and evil; may we stedfastly “eschew those things that are contrary to our profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same.” The collects for the first Sunday in Advent and the third Sunday after Easter, are suitable prayers after such reflections as these;

¹ Eccles. xi. 7.

² Gen. i. 16.

³ Eph. v. 11. See Job xxiv. 16.

⁴ Eph. v. 13.

⁵ 1 Cor. iv. 6.

and none more so than the collect for St. John the Evangelist's day : "Merciful Lord, we beseech Thee to cast Thy bright beams of light upon Thy Church, that it being enlightened by the doctrine of Thy blessed Apostle and Evangelist St. John, may so walk in the light of Thy truth, that it may at length attain to the light of everlasting life ; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."

III.—THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND THE HAPPY FLOCK.

"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." John x. 1—30.—See also Psalm xxiii. Isaiah xl. 11.

THE shepherd has just led his flock into a fresh pasture. He had a lamb in his bosom, as he guided them along the flinty road ; and so gently and tenderly did he lead them, that you would have said, the flock must be his own. They are now feeding in the rich meadow, beside the pleasant stream.

So tenderly does a good shepherd feel for his helpless charge, that in countries where they are exposed to wolves, or other beasts of prey, he will defend them from such dangers, at the hazard of his life. He knows his sheep by name, and they also know his voice, and are ready to follow him, whithersoever he may lead them.

The Lord Jesus is the good Shepherd ; and we are "the people of His pasture, and the sheep of His hand."¹ We are His own flock : for He bought us with His own blood ; and He knows us all by name, and He desires to lead each of us to those pastures which are most suited to our spiritual wants. Especially does He care for the young, the weak, the helpless ; and He will, as it were, carry them in His bosom, and guide them to the waters of comfort. He

¹ Ps. xcvi. 7.

knows that there is a wolf—that is, Satan—ever seeking to enter the fold, that he may carry away the sheep and destroy them; and such was our Shepherd's love for His flock, that He laid down His life for our sake, to save us from that ruin.

Shall we not trust in the mercy and carefulness of this good Shepherd, under every temporal and spiritual sorrow? Shall we not "know His voice," and follow His blessed guidance, and keep within His happy fold? No wolf can ever pluck us out of His hands, if we thus look to Him for help. Let us be meek, and harmless, and useful. So shall we lack nothing that is really good for us in this world; and even in the valley of the shadow of death, His rod and staff will comfort us.

IV.—THE LOST SHEEP.

"What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." Luke xv. 4—7.—See also Psalm cxix. 176. Isa. liii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 25.

As I came over the heath, where the rock shows itself under the scanty pasturage, I noticed a solitary sheep, which had evidently wandered from its fold. It bleated piteously, and was scared at every sound and every shadow. It seemed to be calling for its companions, and vainly trying to recover and retrace the path by which it had so rashly strayed from its home.

I went towards the poor wanderer; but it fled from a stranger;¹ and would probably have perished in that solitude, had not the shepherd missed it from the fold, and come in time to seek it. As soon as he espied it from a distance, he hastened towards it; and the

¹ John x. 5.

sheep, aware of his kindly purpose, suffered him to come near, and take it in his arms. He raised it on his shoulders, and bore it away, rejoicing.

And such, (as I pursued my path,) I said to myself, is the state of one who has wandered from God and happiness, in the maze of sinful lusts and worldly vanities. He finds, at last, that there is no satisfaction in the ways of evil; and that he must have perished in his sin, had not Christ come down from heaven to seek and to save the lost.¹ That gracious Saviour seeks the poor transgressor in the desert, and hastens to persuade him to return. He finds him, and guides him into the path which he was too blind and helpless to recover; and rejoices in bearing back the wanderer to His fold.

V.—THE POLISHED CORNERS OF THE TEMPLE.

“ That our daughters may be as the polished corners of the temple.” Psalm cxliv. 12, Prayer-book version.—See also Gal. ii. 9. Eph. ii. 20—22. Rev. iii. 12.

How gracefully is the roof supported by that range of columns! What strength and beauty do they add to the sacred building! Each one follows the other in a perfect order and an exact proportion to the part assigned to it, in supporting the entire fabric.

Thus fair and glorious is the sight, when the young press forward, with a zeal that is tempered with modesty and reverence, to do their work in the Church of God. What gives such strength and beauty to a Church, as when our sons and daughters thus bear the part which the Master-Builder has assigned to each; and when “young men and maidens” alike “remember their Creator in the days of their youth?”² Then is early piety most full of promise,

¹ Luke xix. 10.

² Ps. cxlviii. 12. Eccles. xii. 1.

when its fervour is most orderly, and ready to spend itself in lowly services and a meek obedience.

VI.—THE HIRELING LOOKING FOR THE EVENING.

“ Is there not an appointed time to man on earth ? are not his days also like the days of an hireling ? As a servant earnestly desireth the shadow, and as an hireling looketh for the reward of his work ? so am I made to possess months of vanity, and wearisome nights are appointed to me.” Job vii. 1—3.—See also Job xiv. 5, 6, 14. Matt. xxii. 1—16. John ix. 4.

LET us watch the labourer at his toilsome task for a few minutes. How faithfully does he exert his strength, that he may honestly earn the hire for which he has undertaken to bear the burden and heat of the day ! Now and then he looks wistfully at the lengthening shadows, and notices how far the sun has gone down in the heavens. Most welcome to him will be the hour of rest and payment ; but he does not suffer himself to suspend his work, until the time agreed upon is come.

Thus is man set upon the earth, to work the work of God for an appointed season ; and thus faithfully should he spend himself and be spent in the service of his gracious Maker. He owes to his Maker every faculty of soul and body ; and that gracious Being has promised to all who serve Him truly a rich reward when the day of life is over. The reward, indeed, will be of grace and not of debt ; for at best we are unprofitable servants, who have done only what it was their duty to do.¹ And who of us has done even so much ?

Let us not waste in folly or in sin the time that is due to God. There is no reason, indeed, why we should not wish for the season of rest, so long as this desire does not make us less diligent in duty. The time for rest will come, when the time for work is over. If we faithfully give ourselves up to our duty

¹ Luke xvii. 10.

where God has placed us, we may with comfort watch the lengthening shadows, and humbly hope, through the merits of our blessed Saviour, that He will own us as His true servants, when the day is come to its close.

VII.—THE LITTLE CHILD.

“And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” Matt. xviii. 2, 3.—See also Job xxxiii. 25. Psalm cxxxii. 2. 1 Cor. xiv. 20. Eph. v. 1. 1 Pet. i. 14.

THOSE who are entrusted with the nurture of a little child, may learn from him lessons as precious as any which it will be their duty and happiness to teach him. The seeds, indeed, of an evil nature are in his heart, even though he has been regenerated in baptism by God’s Holy Spirit; but still he is untainted by the world, and fresh from his Maker’s hands; and our blessed Saviour has made him the type of a child of God.

His artless ways, and his ignorance of worldly craft, are a lesson of that simplicity and freedom from guile which should mark a Christian. He does not desire the first place; but knows himself to be unworthy of notice, except through the condescension and kindness of his elders. He does not thirst for gold or greatness; but loves those who show him kindness, whether they be rich or poor. With real humility he feels his own helplessness and dependence upon others; and never fancies that he can do without their aid. If we see a child venturing, as it were, to stand alone, and trust in his own power; or if we see him already spoilt by affectation, and the love of finery and the world, we say, How little is it childlike! How soon has a withering blast spoilt the freshness of an opening flower!

A little child is trustful and confiding; open, unsuspecting, and forgiving; teachable, and ready to believe. He does not cavil and question. He knows

his powers of mind and body to be only in their dawn ; and that his place is to be a learner, and to obey. Pure as yet from all grosser pollutions ; with a conscience so tender as to be uneasy at sins which too soon are little thought of ; with a heart confiding affectionately in those who take care of him, and are kind to him, he is indeed unconsciously a monitor to all who have eyes to see and hearts to understand. Humility, modesty, and reverence, are ever brought before the minds of those who have to do with little children.

Thus should we know our humble place and feeble faculties ; and with modest reverence guide ourselves by every token of the will of our heavenly Father. We should be pure and truthful ; open and unsuspicuous ; ignorant of malice and evil. Knowing how soon the conscience becomes less tender, and how the possesaion of earthly wisdom is apt to make men cavillers and questioners instead of meek disciples in the school of Christ, we should watch against any sign of a gradual hardening of the conscience ; and, while we should indeed be “ men in understanding,” pray that we may be kept from pride of reason. Should we not also pray for that ready faith in unseen things, and that trustful and affectionate temper, which are so blessed ? And, looking with deeper dread on the evils we have sustained from the world, the flesh, and the devil, we should more and more value the gracious promise : “ His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s : he shall return to the days of his youth.”¹

VIII.—THE FADING LEAF.

“ We all do fade as a leaf.” Isaiah lxiv. 6.—See also Psalm xc. 5, 6. Isaiah i. 30 ; xl. 7. James i. 11.

ALREADY the tints of autumn are stealing upon the forest. Here and there we see a falling leaf ; and in

¹ Job xxxiii. 25.

many which are yet on their branches, the full green of summer is passing into a paler hue.

How gradually does the change come on ! We scarcely perceive a difference from day to day ; but after the interval of a week, it is distinctly seen ; and then the breeze of autumn snaps the link by which the shred was joined to its branch, and wafts it to its resting-place under the parent tree.

And such is the strength of man. “ We all do fade as a leaf.” The freshness of youth soon passes into the maturity of manhood ; and thus, by gradual but rapid steps, the feebleness of age comes on. Thus is “ our strength but labour and sorrow ; so soon passeth it away, and we are gone.”¹

Let it not steal on us unawares ; nor let it be said of us, “ Gray hairs are on him here and there, yet he knoweth it not.”² In youth and health let us think on our common frailty, and put away from us “ the pride of life ;”³ remembering that we must soon return to the dust from whence we came.⁴

The leaves with which the earth is strewn will know no second spring. Our great Redeemer has won for us a resurrection from the grave. So live, that our hope at last may be full of immortality.⁵

IX.—THE STRONG CABLE.

“ A threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Eccles. iv. 12.—See also Gen. xi. 6—8. Psalm cxxxii. John xi. 52 ; xvii. 21—23. Ephes. iv. 4—6.

“ Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope.”⁶ Isaiah v. 18.—See also Jer. xiii. 23. 1 Cor. v. 9.

IF you consider how it is that a hempen twine is made strong enough to draw a loaded waggon, or to

¹ Ps. xc. 10.

² Hosea vii. 9.

³ 1 John ii. 16.

⁴ Gen. iii. 19.

⁵ Wisd. iii. 4.

⁶ See Lowth’s Isaiah.

bear the strain of a ship as she rides at anchor, you will see a significance that perhaps did not occur to you before, in the use which Holy Scripture makes of this work of human art as an emblem.

It is formed of many threads, twisted together into one cord, and these cords are again combined into one cable. Each thread in itself is so weak, that a child could break, or the slightest weight would burst it; but when the threads are twined into one rope, their united strength is such as would have seemed incredible. "A threefold cord is not quickly broken."

The truth is thus brought before us, that union is strength. They who are weak and helpless singly, are able to produce a vast result when they combine their powers. It was in order to restrain His sinful creatures from doing what they had imagined to do,¹ that God scattered them over the face of the earth; and He gathers together again His elect people in one body in Christ, that, by uniting their various energies in one work, and for one end, they may strengthen each other's hands, and effectually "bruise under foot" the powers of darkness. "Every kingdom divided against itself," says our Saviour, "shall not stand;"² and so is it, as to a house, or family, or a Church. The divisions of the Church of Christ have been one great hindrance to its progress among the heathen; and in our own beloved country may God give us grace to lay to heart the dangers caused by our unhappy divisions, and take away all pride and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that as there is but one body and one Spirit, and one hope of our calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all; so we may, henceforth, be all of one heart and one soul; and being united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, may, with one heart and one mind, glorify God through Jesus Christ.³

¹ Gen. xi.

² Matt. xii. 25.

³ See Collect in Service for Queen's Accession.

But there is another lesson suggested to us by the same figure of speech, used in a somewhat different manner: "Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope." The meaning seems to be, that as a strong cable is formed of threads twisted together, so the rooted habit of evil in any heart is formed of numberless single transgressions, each one of which might have been resisted at the time; but when they have, by their united influence, formed a habit, the work of recovery is like that of bursting asunder some strong cable; and thus it is written, "Can the *Æthiopian* change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."

We read of Samson, that when he was bound with ropes, he burst them asunder like a thread,¹ by the wonderful strength which God had given him. And, God be thanked, there is a power by which the most deeply-rooted habits may be broken. The skin of the *Æthiopian* may pass away, and the leopard may lose its spots. But we should learn to resist the beginnings of evil, and to break singly the threads which Satan would wind around us, before they become such a cord as may seem to defy our utmost strength, and we shrink from what we think a hopeless task.

X.—THE FOWLER'S SNARE.

"Surely in vain the net is set in the sight of any bird." Prov. i. 17.
—See also Psalm xci. 3. Psalm cxxiv. 7. Prov. vi. 5; vii. 23.
Eccles. ix. 12. 1 Tim. iii. 7. 2 Tim. ii. 26.

THE fowler has not worked to-day in vain. There is a fluttering of wings among the grass on yonder bank, which shows that some poor bird is taken in his snare, and is vainly struggling to be free. The snare was so

¹ Judges xvi. 12.

skilfully set, that the bird could see nothing of its danger, but flew into it unawares.

There is an enemy, who is ever setting snares in our path. This enemy is Satan ; and the snares are those many false reasonings and vain seductions by which he misleads to their ruin such as are unwary and unstable. To one he says, " Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant."¹ To another, " Do not trouble yourself to repent at once, but wait for a more convenient season."² To a third, " You shall have peace, though you walk in the imagination of your heart, to add drunkenness to thirst."³ To a fourth, " The number is so great of those who are careless and live in pleasure, that God can never take account of each." He adapts the snare to the habits and weakness of each one of us ; as a skilful fowler studies the habits of the several birds which it is his business to take. So many have been taken by the snares of Satan, that his devices may now be said to be " set even in our sight :" and yet wicked people are more foolish than yonder flutterer ; and are caught, though they might see their danger. It is far more difficult to recover ourselves out of the fowler's snare when we have been caught, than to avoid it from the beginning.

XI.—SPARKS FLY UPWARD.

" Although affliction cometh not forth out of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the ground ; yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Job v. 6, 7.—See also Gen. xlvi. 9. Job xiv. 1, 2. Acts xiv. 22. 1 Cor. x. 13. Heb. xii. 7, 8. Prov. vii. 14.

THIS world is under certain laws, which God established when He called it into being, and which act invariably and uniformly. By these laws the sparks as invariably fly upward, as bodies that have

¹ Prov. ix. 17. ² Acts xxiv. 25. ³ See Deut. xxix. 19.

weight fall downward. By these laws the seed that is put into the ground springs and puts forth its blade; and the several seasons succeed each other in a regular order.

In like manner, the life of man is subject to the operation of certain fixed laws: one of which is here said to be as unalterable as the law by which "the sparks fly upward." "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."

This was not always the case. Our first parent was created unto happiness. The earth yielded to him its strength.¹ The elements all ministered to his enjoyment: all things from within and from without wrought, as it were, in harmony and concord, to satisfy his desires, which were only innocent and moderate. But in consequence of his fall, man came under another law, and now is "born unto trouble." "In the sweat of his brow he must eat bread." "Vanity and vexation of spirit" is inscribed on the fairest things of the earth, and on his dearest hopes and possessions: and even of his condition under grace it is written, "Through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom of heaven." "Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."² So that, although the ministrations of heavenly comfort are promised, the cup of sorrow is not removed. The character of sorrow is indeed changed by that grace which maketh all things new;³ it is now the chastisement of a gracious parent, not the infliction of an angry judge; but yet the law remains the same, that man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward.

The same passage of Scripture, however, which declares man's inheritance of sorrow to be as sure as the laws of nature, seems to distinguish between the one and the other. "Affliction cometh not forth out of the dust, neither doth trouble spring out of the

¹ Gen. iii. 18; iv. 12.

² Matt. v. 4.

³ Rev. xxi. 5.

ground." It does not come by chance, nor yet by the operation of a law, the effects of which are the same in all places and to all persons, like the growth of plants from the ground. The law by which we are born to trouble, is administered by a gracious Father, who appoints the time and the kind of trouble, with a merciful consideration both for our peculiar character and our great weakness. He giveth strength according to our day.¹ "He stayeth His rough wind in the day of the east wind."² He suits the burden to the power of bearing it.

Let me, then, regard my "appointed time on earth" in its real character. Let me not, like the young and thoughtless, imagine it a continual round of pleasures and triumphs; but remember that it is a period of chequered happiness and much tribulation. When I see the cup of sorrow dealt round to others by an unseen hand, let me bear in mind that my turn must come, and prepare myself in the day of prosperity for the season of affliction. And when the cup is delivered to me, let me receive it with meekness and cheerfulness, as what I have indeed expected; what I know is meant for my good; what is the necessary fruit of sin; but if it be rightly received, has been turned by God's mercy into one of the remedies for sin. How blessed is it to know that trial comes neither by chance nor yet by the operation of a blind and indiscriminate law, but that in the darkest season we may look up to the merciful Dispenser of joy and sorrow, and say, "My times are in Thy hand!"³ Thou knowest what is good for me. O give me grace to remember what is written: "He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."⁴

¹ Deut. xxxiii. 25.

³ Ps. xxxi. 15.

² Isa. xxvii.

⁴ Ps. cxxvi. 6.

XII.—THE RETURNING SWALLOW.

“ The stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times ; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming ; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.”
 Jer. viii. 7.—See also Luke xix. 44. 2 Cor. vi. 2.

WHAT was it that skimmed over the stream, where the ripples are so bright in the morning sunshine ? It was the first swallow of the returning spring. It has come back to us in its season, nor will it again leave us till the leaves, which are now bursting from their buds, are withered and falling. It is true to the Divine law which concerns its return and its departure. It knows the time to come and the time to go ; and neither loses the summer pleasantness by delaying its return, nor runs the risk of suffering from the winter frost, by prolonging its stay too late.

Surely it gives us a lesson of heavenly wisdom. Consider (it says) the condition of your being ; and observe the right time and the permitted season for doing your appointed work. How many do not begin the work till summer is well-nigh over,¹ and the winter of life is nigh at hand ; when, if they work at all, they work with every disadvantage ! Too many have not the heart to betake themselves to their duty in earnest.

Use rightly the short season while it lasts ; for “ now is the accepted time ; and now is the day of salvation.”

XIII.—THE TREE PLANTED BY THE WATERSIDE.

“ He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season ; his leaf also shall not wither ; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” Ps. i. 3.—See also Numb. xxiv. 6. Isa. lxi. 3. Jer. xvii. 8.

LOOK, my child, at the fruit-tree that is growing so freshly by yonder rivulet. What is there in nature

¹ Jer. viii. 20.

more beautiful? How full is it of life and health! In every bursting bud and every opening flower it seems to enjoy the existence which it has received from the bountiful Creator. As it bends its branches over the sparkling stream, or waves them in the soft wind, as if rejoicing in the sun and showers, it reminds us of that happy garden¹ in which our first parents were placed in the days of their innocency.

It is fed by the running stream near which it grows; and however parching may be the summer heat, its leaf will be green, for its roots will not lack moisture.² Its blossoms give promise of the richest fruits, when the husbandman shall come to gather them in the autumn.

My child, in that fruit-tree you see an emblem of some faithful servant of God. Thus beautiful is Christian holiness to those who have "eyes to see"³ and hearts to understand its beauty. True joy and spiritual health are thus the portion of the righteous, in whom we behold, in some degree, that "image of God"⁴ in which our first parents were created.

The blossoms of yonder tree are like the promise of early piety. Its fruits will be like the "heavenly virtues"⁵ which are seen in a Christian repining for glory. And as it draws its nourishment from the neighbouring stream, so is the Christian's life sustained by the "living water"⁶ which he ever draws from "the wells of salvation."⁷ That living stream is the grace of God's Spirit; first given to us with the water of holy baptism, and ever near to strengthen and refresh us. When the power of temptation is like a scorching heat, the true Christian is still enabled to bear fruits of love and holiness; and the secret of his strength is, that he is supplied with this "spring of living water, springing up unto eternal life."

¹ Gen. ii.

² Luke viii. 6.

³ Deut. xxix. 4.

⁴ Gen. i. 27.

⁵ Baptismal Service.

⁶ John iv. 10.

⁷ Isa. xii. 3.

XIV.—THE COMPASSIONATE FATHER.

“ Like as a father pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear him.” Ps. ciii. 13.—See also Deut. xxxii. 6. Mal. i. 6. Matt. vi. 9. Luke xv. 18. Heb. xii. 9.

WHEN I see a father ruling his own household¹ with an authority both wise and gentle; providing for the present wants of his children, and laying up² for their future support; indulgent to their various tastes, and promoting their blameless pleasures; restraining all evil with a serious admonition, or correcting it with a wise severity; I have before me the truest image which can be seen on earth of that awful and almighty Being, who, by suffering us to call Him “ Father,” has made each earthly father a type or emblem of Himself.

He would teach us, then, to obey His will, and to regard Him with a holy awe and a deep reverence, of the same kind with that which we feel towards the earthly author of our being, who, in our tender years, both chastened and corrected us for our faults, and also taught us the principles of virtue and wisdom. We ought, indeed, to regard all who are our superiors in age or rank, in excellence or acquirements, with lowliness and reverence; but towards none can we feel that veneration with which we look up to him who was to us, in the dawn of reason, almost in the place of God, and towards whom we turned as our provider and instructor, our ruler and example; whose reproofs we dreaded when we were in fault, and to whose praises we looked as our best reward. The filial tenderness and affection with which we turn to him, neither can nor ought to be unaccompanied by this reverential sense of the relation in which we stand, and the duty of obedience, as well as gratitude, which we owe to him.

And thus no thought or feeling of our hearts towards

¹ 1 Tim. iii. 4.

² 2 Cor. xii. 14.

God should be untempered by the recollection that "holy and reverend is His name."¹ Our love for Him should, indeed, be fervent and supreme, but ever joined with the thought that He is "glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders;"² and that the very angels veil their faces before Him, as they say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts."³ "Serve the Lord in fear, and rejoice unto Him with reverence."⁴ "We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence; shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?"

But chiefly, by teaching us to regard Him as a heavenly Parent, and by sending forth into our hearts the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, "Abba, Father,"⁵ God would lead us to look up to Him with affectionate trust, and to repose with comfort on the thought of His fatherly compassion. On what earthly friend do we so depend as on our father, for provision and assistance? To whom do we so turn in trouble with the assurance of finding comfort, and in difficulty with the hope of being guided and advised? If we have committed faults, and the world around is disposed to view those faults with harshness and visit them with severity, we seek a father's ear, into which to pour our sorrows; and we are assured that a father's breast will not be unmoved by the feeling of compassion towards us, nor his lips refuse the promise of forgiveness.

And has not God taught us, that "as a father pitith his own children, even so is the Lord merciful unto them that fear Him?" And if we have departed from His fear, has He not, in the parable of the prodigal son,⁶ assured us that no father more tenderly yearns over a son that has wandered from him than the Lord earnestly desires our return to

¹ Ps. cxi. 9.

² Exod. xv. 11.

³ Isa. vi. 3.

⁴ Ps. ii. 11. Prayer-book version. ⁵ Rom. viii. 15. Gal. iv. 6.

⁶ Luke xv.

holiness, and compassionately welcomes us back when we come to Him as true penitents?

Let me, then, "Arise and go unto my Father, and say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in Thy sight, and am not worthy to be called Thy son." Let me confide assuredly in His paternal love, and trust Him in His chastisements. Let me regard His frown as the greatest evil, and the light of His reconciled countenance¹ as the chiefest good; let me fear, above all things, to vex His Holy Spirit,² and strive to resemble Him; remembering those words of my gracious Saviour, "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."³

XV.—THE TRUE VINE.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." John. xv. 1—8.—See also Isa. iv. 2. Isa. liii. 2. 1 Cor. xiv. 27. 1 Pet. ii. 4, 5.

WHO that looks upon the vine in winter, would imagine its beauty as well as fruitfulness in summer, when it throws its tendrils from one support to another, and the dark clusters of grapes show themselves through many an opening under the rich foliage?

Who that had seen our blessed Saviour in the days of His flesh, when He was a despised and lowly wanderer, would have imagined that so despised a Stem

¹ Ps. iv. 6.

² Isa. lxiii. 10.

³ Matt. v. 48.

would put forth branches, and bud, and blossom, and fill the world with fruit?¹

When our Lord calls Himself "the True Vine," we are instructed to look at the vine as emblematic of Him. Its mean appearance in winter, contrasted with the beauty and abundance of its summer fruits, is one point of the resemblance, which resemblance, however, is chiefly seen in the union between Him and His members. "I am the vine; ye are the branches." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye except ye abide in Me." As the branches obtain from the root and stem of the vine all sap and nourishment, so do we obtain all spiritual grace and blessings only through the Lord Jesus Christ. We do not grow on this stem by nature, but on the corrupt tree of the old Adam, which can yield only evil fruit.² The Father, who is "the Husbandman," severs us by His grace from that evil stock, and grafts us into Christ the True Vine; that we may obtain through Him the great gifts of pardon, peace, and strength; and bear those fruits of holiness which He requires, and by which our Lord tells us that He is "glorified." And having grafted us into Christ in order that we may be fruitful, He prunes us that we may bear more fruit. As a skilful gardener prunes the branches of a vine, not to destroy them, but to make them fruitful; so does the heavenly Husbandman prune His spiritual branches by the chastisements which He sends on them, not "in indignation,"³ but in mercy; to subdue in them the remains of the old nature, and to render their fruit more choice and more abundant. If any branches bear no fruit, they are at length severed from the tree, and bound in bundles to be burnt.

Blessed be Thy name, O Lord, that Thou hast planted this true and living Vine to bear in the world those heavenly fruits of the Spirit⁴ which the old stock

¹ See Numb. xvii. 8, and Isa. xxvii. 6.

³ Ps. vi. 1.

² Matt. vii. 17.

⁴ Gal. v. 22.

could never have produced; and that of Thy sovereign mercy Thou hast grafted me by baptism into this Divine Branch from the root of Jesse. Fruitless and barren as I have been, how great is Thy mercy, that Thou hast not yet cut me off from the tree; but still prunest me and chastenest me for good!

Oh! let me ever "abide" by faith in this Vine; and especially by receiving continually of its "fulness"¹ in the holy communion of my Saviour's body and blood. Let me earnestly endeavour to bear those fruits which are to Thy glory through Jesus Christ; and fearing above all things to be severed from the tree, receive meekly the trials by which Thou wouldest graciously prune me and make me fruitful.

XVI.—SNOW.

"Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Ps. li. 7.—See also Job ix. 30. Isa. i. 18.

THE earth is beautiful in its summer dress; but if you would see it as an emblem of purity and innocence, you must look forth on some bright winter morning, when it is covered with a mantle of snow. There is a transparency in the piercing air; and the few clouds that are seen near the horizon, seem to float in a clearness beyond what belongs to this lower world. The eye fails in some parts to trace the outline of the whitened hills against the sky. Although the air is so transparent, no speck or stain is seen on all the glistening surface. The bright scene impresses us with a feeling of the beauty of a stainless innocence; and a secret wish arises in the heart that this rude, bad world could be for ever purified; that everything which defileth could be for ever done away, even as no such thing shall enter into the eternal city.²

Deepen, O Lord, in my soul a conviction of the

¹ John i. 16.

² Rev. xxi. 27.

foulness of sin, and the excellency of true holiness. I acknowledge that it is soiled and stained by numberless pollutions of evil, and I confess, with Thy servant of old, "If I wash myself in snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt Thou plunge me in the ditch, and my own clothes shall abhor me." But Thou hast promised, that though our "sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." To Thee I look for cleansing and sanctifying grace. "Purge me, O Lord, with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Cleanse me in that precious blood in which Thou hast taught me, that Thy saints wash their garments and make them white.'

XVII.—THE SOW RETURNING TO THE MIRE.

"It is happened unto them according to the true proverb, the dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." 2 Pet. ii. 22.—See also 2 Chron. xxiv. 2, 18, 22. Prov. xxvi. 11. Luke viii. 13. Heb. x. 26—29.

How many are there who seem for a time to "have escaped the pollutions of the world, through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ"; and are then again entangled therein and overcome! They were not only washed from original sin in the waters of baptism, but they seemed for a time to have been proof against corruption. At length some new temptation occurs; some change of outward circumstances exposes them to a new trial, or some restraint is removed, which curbed the besetting sin; and they again give way to the old evil, and often run even to a greater excess of riot.³ Holy Scripture likens such persons to the dog that "is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire." These images excite in us the feelings

¹ Rev. vii. 14.² 2 Pet. ii. 20.³ 1 Pet. iv. 4.

of disgust and aversion ; and they are used, not only to show the loathsomeness of such a return to evil, and the degraded condition of these unhappy persons in the sight of God and all pure and happy spirits ; but also to remind us, that as the instinct of these inferior creatures impels them to what is congenial to their nature, so "the old man"¹ in us is ever liable to break out again in its evil tendencies, unless we are continually watchful to keep it under, and bring it into subjection.²

The restraints against evil which are only outward are of little real avail. King Joash³ did that which was right all the days of Jehoiada the priest ; but when the restraint and awe of that faithful servant of God was removed, he broke out into the most grievous crimes. What we want is an inward principle of holiness ; and we should continually pray that the evil nature in us may not only be restrained, but rooted out ; that the old man be not only weakened in us, but so buried that the new man may be raised up in us.⁴

And we cannot too often reflect, that by any return to the pollutions of the world, a man assimilates himself to those inferior creatures whose habits are so revolting to the commonest feelings of our own nature. Nothing can be useless which may serve by God's blessing to deepen and strengthen in our hearts the conviction of the moral loathsomeness of vice.

XVIII.—THE ANT.

"Go to the ant, thou sluggard ; consider her ways, and be wise : which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." Prov. vi. 6—8.
—See also Mat. xxv. 26. Luke xiv. 25—33 ; xvi. 1—12.

A LITTLE insect is here brought forward to reprove our sloth and thoughtlessness. We are desired to

¹ Eph. iv. 22.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27.

³ 2 Chron. xxiv.

⁴ See the Office for Public Baptism of Infants.

consider her wise foresight and her voluntary labour. Knowing that a time must come when she will vainly seek her usual food on the surface of the ground, she "provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." She does not suffer the food to perish which in the winter she will rejoice that she had stored up against that pinching season; nor does she waste the time on the right employment of which her comfort will then so greatly depend. Her toil and perseverance are prompted only by that natural instinct which suggests to her that in the season of dearth she shall need the store which she lays up in the season of plenty. She "has no guide, overseer, or ruler." With skilful and patient labour she adds, day by day, to her heap; and wants no continual exhortation of others to stir her up to her duty and employment.

How different is this diligence from the conduct of thoughtless man, who knows that a day is coming when he shall need an interest in his Redeemer's sufferings, and a treasure laid up in heaven;¹ and yet takes no pains to secure the one, nor to provide the other! In things which relate only to this present life, we too often see the most astonishing want of foresight; and how, for lack of exertion and pains-taking, men let slip the most important advantages. The wise king has brought before us the picture of a sluggard turning on his bed, as a door turneth on his hinges; and when he should rouse himself to useful labour, still calling out for more indulgence in sleep.² Perhaps too many of us have at times given way to this disgraceful sluggishness; and the time of prayer or other duties has been shortened, because the time of sleep has been improperly prolonged. It is not easy to say in how great a degree health of mind, as well as health of body, depends upon early rising. Unless some quiet time for devotion and study is secured before the turmoil of worldly affairs is begun, the soul

¹ Matt. vi. 20.² Prov. xxiv. 33, and xxvi. 14.

will certainly languish, and it will walk far less happily in the light of the Lord than if its prayer had been indeed directed to God early in the morning, and its eyes had then looked up unto the hills from whence its help cometh.¹

Useful work of some kind or other, amounting in reality to such labour or occupation as requires diligence and self-denial, is the duty of all, whether rich or poor; and the poor have one great advantage in this respect over the rich, inasmuch as they have less temptation to that idleness and pride which so often go along with fulness of bread.² Many, however, are active and pains-taking in the affairs of this life, who are asleep about their souls, and still put off the discharge of their duties. They take no pains to provide the oil without which the lamp will be useless;³ and though God sends His ministers to rouse them to a sense of their true interest, His overseers to guide them and watch over them, they think only of the present life. Too late they will find that spiritual poverty surely follows spiritual sloth. Their "poverty will come as one that travelleth, and their wants as an armed man."⁴ Their souls will be destitute of "the true riches"⁵ in that day, when the greatest earthly profits or success will be vain and useless.

Lord, give me grace that I may be wise in time; and learn even from the ant the lesson of foresight and diligence, for which Thou sendest me to her. In life let me prepare for death; and in time for eternity.

XIX.—THE MARRIAGE UNION.

"The husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse

¹ Ps. v. 3, and cxxi. 1.

² Ezek. xvi. 49.

³ Matt. xxv. 1.

⁴ Prov. vi. 11.

⁵ Luke xvi. 11.

it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church; for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church." Eph. v. 23—32.—See also Isa. liv. 5. Hos. ii. 19, 20. Rev. xix. 7. 9.

As a royal bride is the emblem of the Church of Christ, so the marriage-union is the type of the mysterious relation between Him and His people. The Office in the Prayer-book for holy Matrimony thus reminds us, after the example of Scripture, that 'matrimony is an honourable estate instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying to us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church.' The Apostle intimates that this sacred relation was typified in the union of our first parents, and also in the particular manner of Eve's formation out of the substance of Adam.¹ And he says, in another place, "The head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God."²

As then between a man and his wife, so also between Christ and His Church, there is an union of the most entire love and mutual complacency. And it is meant that this union shall subsist for ever; for He says, "I will betroth thee unto Me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness, and thou shalt know the Lord."³

But the great resemblance which is intended, is found in the never-failing protection afforded by the husband to the wife, and in the wife's withdrawal of her affections from all earthly objects, and her entire surrender to her husband of her whole heart and

¹ Gen. ii. 21.

² 1 Cor. xi. 3.

³ Hos. ii. 19, 20

mind. How great must be the love of Christ for the Church, who gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify it for Himself, and that it might be holy and without blemish! And how entirely should the Church be subject to her heavenly Lord, and seek to do in all things whatsoever is pleasing in His sight!

Let married people also consider, since their honourable estate is thus consecrated into so divine a mystery, what a view is thus brought before them of the tender support which is due from the husband to the wife, and the reverence and submission which the wife should render to the husband. They who embitter their union by strife and clamour, do not only forget their marriage vows, but also dishonour a sacred mystery.

The union between Christ and His Church, which is so close and tender even here, will hereafter be known more fully, and this "great mystery" will be better understood. May we prepare ourselves for that more immediate presence into which we shall then enter! How assuredly may we trust the love of Him to whom we are so closely and tenderly related; and how earnestly should we say with the Psalmist, "I hate the sins of unfaithfulness; there shall no such cleave unto me!"¹

XX.—LAMBS AMONG WOLVES.

"I send you forth as lambs among wolves." Luke x. 3.—See also Isa. xi. 6. Matt. vii. 15. John xxi. 15. Acts xx. 29.

WHEN the Lord sent His seventy disciples to preach the kingdom of God, He told them that they went "as lambs among wolves." He would not have them go blindly into danger, without first counting the cost;² and in thus preparing them for what was before

¹ Ps. ci. 4, Prayer-Book vers.

² Luke xiv. 28.

them, He perhaps meant also to remind them of that difference of character which must distinguish and sever them from the world around them. The Jews at that time were filling up the measure of their iniquities,¹ and showing what human nature becomes when given up to its own devices. And as the preaching of Christ's disciples would offend the most cherished prejudices of their countrymen, there was doubtless something peculiar in their case, in respect both of the danger to be incurred, and also of the perceptible difference that would be between the servants of God and His enemies.

But the figure of speech here used by our blessed Saviour will always, in a real sense, represent the condition of His Church in the world. As the evil spirit is spoken of as "the wolf that catcheth and destroyeth the sheep,"² so they who are his children, because they do his works,³ are likewisespoken of as wolves, "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord."⁴ The people of Christ, on the other hand, are spoken of as "lambs," as well from their seeming helplessness as from their peaceableness and patience. How truly does this figure describe the holy Stephen⁵ surrounded by the fierce council, when they gnashed upon him with their teeth, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, although they had just before seen his face as though it had been the face of an angel! Or still more does it apply to our blessed Lord Himself, when He was encompassed by that fierce multitude which cried, "His blood be on us, and on our children."⁶ He "looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but there was none."⁷ It is said expressly of Him on that occasion, to show His meekness and patience, "He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,

¹ Matt. xxiii. 32.

² John x. 12.

³ John viii. 41-44.

⁴ Acts ix. 1.

⁵ Acts vi. and viii.

⁶ Matt. xxii. 25.

⁷ Ps. lxix. 20.

and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth."¹

And "as He is, so are"² His disciples in the world. We may bless God, indeed, that in this age and country the profession of His pure and undefiled religion does not expose us to the terrible sufferings which in former days the people of God have undergone for their principles; but still our calling and duty is to "walk by faith"³ in a world which thinks only of "the things that are seen;"⁴ and if we do this faithfully, we shall continually condemn its works⁵ both by our principles and conduct, and we shall draw down on ourselves more or less of its dislike and opposition.

We must, therefore, count our cost, and be prepared for this result of sincerely serving God, and of seeking a city yet to come.⁶ Our part must be to remember that "as lambs among wolves," so should Christians be distinguished by patience and by innocence of life in an ungodly world. If reviled, we must not revile again.⁷ If injured, we must "overcome evil with good."⁸ In all things there must be a real principle of distinction between us and those who are not influenced by the faith which they profess. And we may remember for our comfort that Christ would never have sent His disciples forth as "lambs among wolves," unless He had meant to sustain their seeming helplessness by the supply of a divine power. His Church seems, at any moment, to be at the mercy of the world; and yet the world is really borne with for the sake of the Church.⁹ "God ever chooseth the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, and are not, to bring to

¹ Isa. liii. 7.

⁴ 2 Cor. iv. 18.

⁷ 1 Pet. ii. 23.

⁹ Gen. xix. 22. Matt. xxiv. 22.

² 1 John iv. 17.

⁵ Heb. xi. 7.

³ 2 Cor. v. 7.

⁶ Heb. xiii. 14.

⁸ Rom. xii. 21.

nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in His presence.”¹

XXI.—THE CITY SET ON A HILL.

“A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.” Matt. v. 14.—See also Numb. xxxv. 13—15. Ps. xxxi. 21. Matt. x. 32. John xiii. 35.

THE city on yonder steep has been again and again in our sight, as we have continued our ramble through the fields and copses. If hid for a time by some intervening hill, or lost to view from the winding course of the paths which we took, it soon burst upon us again as we issued from a wood, or climbed another brow. At every new turn it has seemed to remind us of itself again, and of all the busy interests and labours that are rife within these walls. The towers and spires which are like a crown on that pleasant slope, again and again called up a train of thoughts, very different from such as naturally belong to the sylvan scenes through which we wandered.

Each servant of God must be in his vocation and calling, as “a city set on a hill.” He must not so mix himself up with an ungodly world, as not to be discerned and separated from it by a difference of principle and habits. His whole life and conversation being framed in conformity with the word of God, must testify that he is “of another spirit,”² from the mind of the careless and disobedient; and he must also, according to his means and opportunities, be in this world as “a son of consolation;”³ a minister of mercy and rest to the weary and the heavy-laden.

We are cautioned, indeed, against doing anything from an ostentatious or self-righteous temper; but as “a city that is set on a hill cannot be hid,” so a man cannot faithfully act up to the principles of the

¹ Cor. i. 27—29.

² Numb. xiv. 24.

³ Acts iv. 36.

Gospel of Christ without, in the long run, making it plain to those around him, that he acts from a heavenly hope, and with a view to unseen things. And this fact has been divinely ordered for the increase of true religion in this world. When men take note of any one, that he is consistently influenced by an unearthly principle, which purifies his life, sustains him in trouble, humbles him in prosperity, and quickens him to whatever is lovely and of good report,¹ they are drawn to seek grace from God, that the same Divine principles may be implanted in their own hearts, and may bear the same blessed fruits. So that, while we watch carefully against any signs of a vainglorious or ostentatious spirit, we must remember that charity forbids us to hide our true character under a veil of conformity to the maxims of the world. We should often examine whether or not our practice would be essentially different, if we had never heard of Christianity; and whether they who notice our habitual ways and temper, could ascertain what are the principles which we profess, from observing the practices in which we live.

XXII.—THE BRUISED REED AND THE SMOKING FLAX.

“A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench.” Isa. xlii. 3.—See also Zech. iv. 10. Gal. vi. 1. 2 Pet. iii. 15.

“THE bruised reed,” which has been crushed by some weight that has passed over it, and appears to be bowed hopelessly to the ground, is the emblem of one who has been crushed under the weight² of his sins, and of all that sorrow and remorse which are sure to follow in their train. The principle of life in him is not, indeed, utterly extinct; but he is

¹ Phil. iv. 8.

² Heb. xii. 1.

humbled, as it were, to the very dust, and looked down upon by the proud and self-righteous. They would not scruple to crush the fallen Christian more severely—to break the bruised reed irrecoverably.

“The smoking flax” is another emblem of the same case: and with this additional resemblance. If the flax which has been lighted will not burn, its smoke is so offensive that all cry out impatiently to have it quenched as soon as possible. And this fact is elsewhere¹ used to show how abominable are the wicked in the sight of their holy Maker; for He says of them (and especially of such as say to their fellow-sinners, Stand by thyself, for I am holier than thou), “These are a smoke in My nose; a fire that burneth all the day;” that is, not a quick and pleasant flame, but a mere smouldering fire; such as lingers in flax when too damp for any flame to break out, and emitting only a noxious smoke.

God has assured us that our gracious Saviour (for it is of Him that the prophet speaks, see Matt. xii. 20) will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax. He will endure with much long-suffering what proud men would impatiently quench; and He will not rashly snap asunder the last thread by which a spiritual life keeps its hold on the soul of one who has fallen. He will deal gently with those who are bowed down by their own reproaching conscience, or crushed under the censures of a frowning world. He will give them space to repent, and will endeavour even to raise the bruised reed, and to quicken into a flame the smoking flax. He will bear with the infirmities of those who may yet be revived to a lively hope; and He will comfort the wounded conscience, and cherish the faint beginnings of grace.

Thus has God suggested to us a lesson of peace and hope, even from the bruised reed which you were so rudely about to break. Spare it for the sake of

¹ Isa. lxv. 5.

the consoling truth and the word of mercy, which it preaches to us in its bent and crushed condition, and learn to minister to those whose fallen state it represents. Pray that the spark of Divine life may burn brightly in your own soul, and seek to kindle it into a steady flame, wherever it seems almost quenched. “If any be overtaken in a fault restore such an one in the spirit of meekness.”

And remember that it is far better to be as a bruised reed, (of a contrite and humble spirit,¹) than to be² as the cedars of Lebanon that are exalted and lifted up, or as the oaks of Bashan, on which the day of the Lord of hosts shall be. For “the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day.”

XXII.—THE HEN GATHERING HER BROOD.

“O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! thou that killst the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not.” Matt. xxiii. 37.—See also Deut. xxxii. 11, 12. Ps. xci. 4; lxiii. 7.

Some enemy of yonder helpless brood has appeared in sight. They run instinctively to the parent bird, with all the agitation of terror, but with the most undoubting confidence of finding shelter and protection.

Nor are they disappointed in their hope. The hen also has caught sight of the hawk that is hovering over the grassy court, and she hastens forward to meet her frightened brood. Fearless in defence of her young, she places herself in front of the danger. She “gathers her chickens under her wings.” Not one of them is denied admission to that hiding-place, which they all so fondly seek, under a sense of their

¹ Isa. lvii. 15.

² Isa. ii.

own utter helplessness. With maternal care she looks round to see that each has been alarmed in time, and is safe under her sheltering wings. And now, though every motion and sound betrays her anxiety and tenderness, she is satisfied in being prepared for the worst that may come. She knows that no enemy can reach her young but by first destroying herself.

How beautiful in so lowly and timid a creature is such an instance of tenderness; such forgetfulness of her own danger and her own feebleness, in the defence of her more helpless progeny! How wonderful an endowment is the gift of instinct; less exalted, indeed, than reason in its capacities; but more true and faultless in exercising them, so far as they extend! But, above all, how wonderful that so lowly a creature should be capable of feelings and conduct which admit of comparison with the mercy shown by the Most Highest towards the children of men! He has been graciously pleased to point to this instance of maternal love as an emblem of His own unspeakable tenderness and compassion towards us; in order that we may confide in Him, and flee to Him for refuge in time. When our blessed Lord foresaw the coming desolation of Jerusalem, "How often (said He) would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings." He spoke with the yearnings of that amazing love which brought Him down from heaven to die upon the cross; and of which a mother's love for her young is the nearest resemblance that can be seen on earth, for its purity, its intenseness, and its forgetfulness of self. Yet how faint is even the maternal instinct, when compared with His Divine compassion! "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee."¹

He knew our danger. He thought not of His own

¹ Isa. xlix. 15.

sufferings. He hid not Himself from shame and from the cross. He placed Himself in the very front of the danger ; and on His side, and hands, and feet, are the wounds received in that conflict with the powers of darkness, which, for our sake, He underwent. He looks around to see if we will not flee to Him for protection, and, as it were, hide ourselves under the shadow of His wings, until this tyranny be overpast.¹

How many despise the danger, and will not believe in the necessity of the shelter, till too late ! How many think themselves able to meet it by their own strength ; or that they may safely delay to betake themselves to the hiding-place provided ! The enemy comes upon them before they are aware ; and then they vainly look from a distance to the refuge which was as open to them as to others, but they would not flee to it.

Lord, give me a wiser and a happier mind ! Knowing Thy unspeakable compassion, let me fly to Thee in time from every terror,—from the malice of Satan, the reproaches of conscience, the strength of temptation, the fear of death or of coming evil. And do Thou hide me always under the shadow of Thy wings ! As yon helpless brood nestles in more closely to their parent's side, the nearer and the more imminent the danger ; so let every cause of sorrow or dismay lead me only to trust more simply to Thy mercy, and cling more closely to Thy sure protection !

XXIV.—THE SUN AN EMBLEM OF CHRIST.

“ Unto you that fear my name, shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” Mal. iv. 2.—See also Ps. xix. 4—6. Luke i. 78.

THE sun is the fountain of light to this lower world. Day by day, it rises on us with its gladdening beams :

¹ Ps. lvii. 1.

and with the return of light is connected the sense of reviving power in ourselves; invigorated health and cheerfulness; renewed and willing application to appointed duties. God Himself has made it the ruler over the day. All nature seems to own its influence. The flowers that drooped, or closed their leaves during the night, expand themselves again when the sun ariseth. The gorgeous colours with which the clouds that were lately dark are now illuminated, bespeak the return of the absent king; and the clouds themselves are scattered at his approach. The loathsome or savage creatures that love darkness now "get them away together, and lay them down in their dens. Man goeth forth to his work, and to his labour until the evening."¹

Christ is to the moral world what the sun is to the natural world: the Source of life, and health, and motion. He is "the Sun of Righteousness;" because the robe of righteousness in which His people "shine," is the light which they reflect from Him; and on this account His Church is said² to be "clothed with the sun." And the inward righteousness also, in which they are created anew after the image of God,³ is derived from His illuminating presence in their hearts. And He rises on us "with healing in His wings;" because He brings with Him, day by day, spiritual health to those who are diseased in soul, comfort to those who mourn, rest to the weary and heavy-laden.⁴

The world had long lain in darkness and the shadow of death,⁵ waiting with "earnest expectation"⁶ for the first tokens of "the day-spring from on high;" even as travellers in a starless night, or as they that watch in loneliness and weariness, wait with eager longing⁷ for the burst of morning. At length the Sun of Righteousness arose; when He who was with

¹ Ps. civ. 22, 23.

² Rev. xii. 1.

³ Eph. iv. 24, and Col. iii. 10.

⁴ Isa. lxi. 1, 2. Matt. xi. 28.

⁵ Isa. ix. 2.

⁶ Rom. viii. 19.

⁷ Ps. cxxx. 6.

the Father from all eternity was born at Bethlehem ; and took our nature upon Him. And as the light from the morning sun travels with inconceivable speed¹ to the remotest corners of the earth, and penetrates into the darkest recesses ; so did the light from the Sun of Righteousness penetrate “the dark places of the earth.”² It scattered the mists of ignorance and sin, and called forth from the garden of God’s Church³ those fruits and flowers which it could never otherwise have borne. Nor is His power to heal and comfort diminished by the lapse of years. As the sun in the heavens has the same quickening and cheering power over the material world as in the day when God first formed it and set it in the heavens ; so have the beams of the Sun of Righteousness the same efficacy to heal the wounded conscience, and to comfort the afflicted soul, as when they first shone upon His humble followers.

Remember that we need the daily influence of that cheering presence as much as the natural world requires the daily action of the returning sun. And if we know ourselves the value of that spiritual health which can be attained only by His blessed influence, we shall earnestly pray and endeavour that the same Sun of Righteousness may arise on all nations which are yet unacquainted with Its healing power ; and that as the ruler of the spiritual heaven, He may sway the hearts of men in all parts of the world ; drawing them unto Himself,⁴ and ordering all their unruly wills and affections.⁵

XXV.—THE WASTE HOWLING WILDERNESS.

“He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness.” Deut. xxxii. 10.—See also Isa. xxxv. 1; xl. 3. Rev. xii. 6.

THE warm feelings and the lively fancy of youth lead us to imagine this world a place of endless pleasure ;

¹ See Bishop Horne’s Comment on Ps. xix.

² Cant. iv. 12.

³ Ps. lxxiv. 20.

⁴ John xii. 32.

⁵ Collect for Fourth Sunday after Easter.

where light toil is followed by fresh amusement ; where each new candidate for happiness is received with frankness and assisted with ready zeal ; where every wish is crowned with success, and there is no time for sorrow in the perpetual round of interest and occupation. Holy Scripture represents the world as a “waste howling wilderness :” “Waste,” because it bears no fruit that is really healthful or satisfying ;¹ and “howling,” because it is peopled by those who are as the wild beasts of the desert in unruly passions and mutual injury. Its dark places are said² to be full of the habitations of cruelty. The terrible wilderness in which the children of Israel wandered forty years on their way to Canaan, is the Scriptural type of the world. And experience soon shows that the account which Holy Scripture gives of the world is the true account. Its pleasures are tempting in appearance, but bitter to those who eagerly seize them. Instead of receiving the new-comer with cordial welcome and frank assistance, its inhabitants seek only to take advantage of his simplicity, and to keep the start of him in the race for those things which they count desirable. The weak, the afflicted, and the friendless, are scornfully passed over, or oppressed with cruelty.

Such is the wilderness which we have to cross on our way to Heaven. God finds us in it as infants who have been exposed by their parents, and are lying in their blood, and perishing.³ He saves us by His sovereign grace, and adds us to His Holy Church. He gives us His word to be “a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path,”⁴ so that on “the dark mountains,”⁵ and beside the dangerous pits, our feet may not stumble ; but that we may be able to make out the true way, though sometimes (it may be) only a step at a time.

Not even this lantern, however, will avail “to keep us from falling,”⁶ unless we lean always on that invis-

¹ Isa. lv. 2.

² Pa. lxxiv. 20.

³ Ezek. xvi. 6.

⁴ Ps. cxix. 105.

⁵ Jer. xiii. 16.

⁶ Jude 24.

ble, but ever-present, Friend, who “ sticketh closer than a brother.”¹ Our wisdom will be to remember at all times the true nature of this place in which our pilgrimage is appointed ; that so we may never be tempted to linger on the road by anything that seems fair on the right hand or on the left. We shall pity those who are looking for a home, where all is so hollow and so dark ; and we shall seek occasions for persuading them to join us, as Moses persuaded Hobab,² by saying to him, “ We are journeying unto the place of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you. Come thou with us, and we will do thee good ; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel.”

XXVI.—THE CHOICE GARDEN.

“ How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob ! and thy tabernacles, O Israel ! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river’s side, as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar-trees beside the waters.” Numb. xxiv. 5, 6.—See also Gen. ii. 15. Isa. li. 8 ; lxi. 11. Jer. xxxi. 12.

As the waste wilderness is the emblem of the world, so a choice garden is set forth in Holy Scripture as an image of God’s Church. A garden is a place enclosed out of the common waste ground, and set apart for special culture and fruitfulness. Its site is chosen for advantage of soil and shelter ; and for that abundant supply of water, which is so needful for the health and produce of its plants. Care is ever taken to screen it from every rude blast ; to maintain or improve the natural goodness of the ground, and to make the water flow in such channels as may conduct it most easily to the several plots and borders. In that happy garden, which God separated from the world around, for our first parents, we read³ of a river that “ went out of Eden to water the garden ;” and that “ it was parted, and became into four heads.” In laying out

¹ Prov. xviii. 24.

² Numb. x. 29.

³ Gen. ii. 10.

a garden, it is divided and arranged, just as in that happy place, according to some well-ordered pattern, so as to bespeak an unity of design ; and he who is set “ to dress it and to keep it,” is ever careful both to remove whatever is common and unsightly, and to fill every nook and angle with the choicest flowers, and the most useful and delicious fruits. The owner of the garden delights to come into it when the tender shoots are first showing themselves above the ground, or when it is in all the pride of summer beauty or autumnal fruitfulness. Its sunny stillness and repose invite him to peaceful meditation. Its exact order, and its smooth lawns, and its many-coloured borders, and cool shades, and clear waters, are soothing to the eye that is wearied with the glare and confusion of the crowded marts ; and the soft breeze that whispers among the fruits and flowers is laden with the most grateful fragrance.

It is thus that God has chosen out of the world a Church or “ peculiar people,”¹ to be his own portion and inheritance. He fences² and protects it from the enemies that seek its ruin ; and sets in it the choicest plants,³ to bear those fruits and flowers which are of price in His sight. It is the paradise of His beloved Son, who is the second Adam ;⁴ and whose care it is to remove from it the weeds of sin and selfishness ; and to preserve it in that godly order, and that blessed unity which makes it the image upon earth, not only of the heavenly peace, but even of the Divine Unity itself. His Holy Spirit is the fountain⁵ in the midst of the garden which nourishes and refreshes the plants ; and is also the gentle breath⁶ which bears the fragrance of its flowers to Him who is pleased to receive graciously what in itself is unworthy of being offered to Him. He sets His servants, the bishops and pastors of His Church, to tend and cherish the various plants on which He is pleased to set such

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 9. ² Isa. v. 2. ³ Ps. xcii. 13 ; Isa. lxi. 3.

⁴ 1 Cor. xv. 45. ⁵ John iv. 14. ⁶ Pa. civ. 30, Prayer-book vers.

store, and to see, when He shall come into His garden, that there be nothing there to offend those Eyes which are too pure to behold iniquity.¹ Whatever resembles the fruits of the evil world, must be rooted out; whatever is useful and lovely, must be planted and fostered.

Thus it was that when the Prophet of old looked down from Zophim on God's elder Church coming up out of the wilderness,² he was struck with the image of order and beauty which was brought before his view. "How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob; and thy tabernacles, O Israel! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side; as the trees of lign-aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters."

And thus, when the Christian or Universal Church was planted in the several nations of this divided and distracted world, there was seen on earth a miracle of unity and order, such as was unknown before. In every land one faith was inculcated, one baptism, one hope, one Apostolic government, one principle of holiness and obedience.³ And though this blessed order and concord has been too much marred and interrupted by the self-will and perverseness of men, yet still the fairest image of Divine Unity on earth is to be seen in the Church of Christ; bearing witness for the heavenly hope in all parts of the world, and amidst many schisms and divisions, holding fast the glorious deeds and the inspired writings received from those who are gone before. In its bosom, the weary still find repose,⁴ and the penitent meet with comfort;⁵ the ignorant are instructed; the sinful are reclaimed; and the rich variety of heavenly fruits is drawn from the soil that could not naturally have borne them.

¹ Hab. i. 18.

² Cant. iii. 6.

³ Eph. iv. 4—6.

⁴ Isa. xxvi. 20.

⁵ 2 Cor. i. 4.

XXVII.—THE NEEDLESS DANGER.

“He that passeth by and meddleth with strife belonging not unto him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.” Prov. xxvi. 17.—See also Matt. v. 9. Luke xii. 14. John xxi. 22. 1 Thessa. iv. 11. 1 Pet. iv. 15.

IT has pleased God to teach us the rules of practical wisdom by many homely figures; and He would have us learn the folly of meddling with strife not belonging to us, by the case of one who should take a snarling cur by the ears. From an idle whim or a fool-hardy venture, he thinks to show his prowess, and that he is able to master the dog which others scarcely dare come near. When he has taken it by the ears, he finds his folly; for, if he continues to hold it, his time is lost; and if he lets it go, it will fly at him before he can get beyond its reach. He has exposed himself both to pain and ridicule by a foolish attempt to get credit for courage and dexterity.

He is the emblem of one who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him. This is what many people are apt to do. Their overweening conceit of their own influence and wisdom, makes them think that they have only to step forward and act as umpires between angry disputants, in order to bring both parties to reason; whereas their interference only aggravates the quarrel, and brings the anger of at least one party on themselves. They have no call to interfere; but they think themselves so well able to set matters to rights, that they officiously thrust themselves into contentions with which they have no concern: and then meet only with ridicule and trouble for their pains. They are justly blamed for conceit and meddlesome forwardness, even when their intention is admitted to have been good. A modest distrust of their own powers, and a consciousness of the imperfect manner in which they discharge the duties really incumbent on them, would have kept them from forcing themselves into notice, and from meddling with what they have no call or commission to give an opinion

upon. The world and the Church would have been far less disturbed by divisions and contentions, if forward men would have minded their own business, and if none had taken in hand to set things to rights but those who were really authorised to do so. The peace of families also would often be more promoted by a quiet and unobtrusive attention to our own duties, than by a meddlesome conceit, that we can bend those who are at variance to the law of wisdom and forbearance.

Yet, on the other hand, it often happens that we shrink from trying to make peace between those who are at strife, from a blameable fear of ourselves getting into trouble. When Moses¹ would have set at one his brethren who were striving, he at once got into trouble himself; for he that did the wrong said unto him, "Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us?" Yet we believe that he was right to interfere, because he knew that God, by his hand, would deliver the children of Israel. And thus, when we have a real opportunity of making peace, we must not shrink from using it for fear of personal trouble; but act the blessed part of Barnabas,² who, when the disciples looked on Paul with suspicion, took that great Apostle, and brought him to the other Apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Our Lord has said, "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God." Whenever God calls us to this duty, we should gladly and zealously seek to mediate and to make peace; but beware also of stepping forward from a conceited and officious temper, when the mediation can only provoke fresh strife, instead of putting an end to what has already arisen.

¹ Acts vii. 24—29.

² Acts ix. 27.

Holy Scripture.

XXVIII.—IRON SHARPENETH IRON.

“As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.” Prov. xxvii. 17.—See also Mal. iii. 16. Luke xxiv. 32. 1 Cor. xii. 26; xv. 33. 1 Pet. iii. 8.

THE common expedient for sharpening an iron instrument that has become blunt, is by rubbing it against a file of the same metal. It thus regains its polish and the keenness of its edge. It is in like manner by means of social intercourse between man and man, and especially by the frequent converse of virtuous friends, that the dulness of the mind is brightened, and its powers of useful exertion are stimulated and exercised. A man becomes morose and harsh, who has little conversation with his fellow-creatures; and even if he gains much knowledge by solitary study, it is apt to lie with little practical advantage in his mind; while he cannot readily avail himself either of his acquired stores or his natural faculties.

Social intercourse is like a file, which rubs off the harshness and rust which solitude is apt to engender. From the collision of mind with mind, the most useful thoughts are often struck out; and the stores that would otherwise be useless, are turned to good account. We are taught, therefore, of what importance is a due share of social intercourse with wise and virtuous friends, not only for pastime and refreshment under the cares of life, but as a means which God has ordained for our mutual improvement, and the healthful exercise of the faculties with which He has entrusted us. Christian courtesy will lose its nice discernment and its ready sympathy, unless it be kept in continued exercise. The mind turned in upon itself, will become morose and selfish as well as blunt. Only, in all intercourse with others, remember the purpose for which God has ordained it. “Let your speech

be always with grace, seasoned with salt.”¹ Especially bear in mind, that as the conversation of the good quickens in the soul its purposes of good, and its powers of usefulness, so the conversation of the wicked serves only to strengthen every evil tendency.

XXIX.—THE BRAND PLUCKED FROM THE FIRE.

“And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan ! even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire ?” Zech. iii. 2.

THE fire is already blackening and scorching the brand; but there is yet time to snatch it from the flame, and to save it for some nobler use. Linger not, but seize it, ere too late. Another minute, and you could not have plucked it from the fire. It bears the marks of the peril from which it has been scarcely saved: but having thus far concerned yourself to preserve it, you will not lightly throw it back again into the flame. Every one feels an interest in the merest trifle which he has been the means of saving from destruction; and where we have been able to confer some remarkable benefit, we are on that very account disposed to confer more.

When the Jews were brought back from Babylon, the prophet Zechariah, in a vision, saw Joshua, the high-priest, standing, as a representative of the Jewish Church, before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. “And the Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem, rebuke thee. Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire ?” The Jewish Church, at that time of recent deliverance, had many marks of sin as well as of suffering; and Satan was ready to take advantage of whatever spots and blemishes he could find in her. But

¹ Col. iv. 6.

God had not delivered His Church from her long captivity in order to deliver her to the malice of a more cruel enemy than the king of Babylon. She was a brand plucked out of the fire, and bore, indeed, the marks of that scorching flame: but God had not plucked out the brand only to cast it into a yet fiercer furnace. It was His gracious purpose to save it for a nobler use. The reasoning with which Manoah's wife silenced her husband's fears,¹ seems to express the meaning of the Lord's answer to Satan at this time, "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, He would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands; neither would He have showed us all these things, nor have told us such things as these."

This vision, which was seen by Zechariah concerning the Jewish church, is an illustration also of God's distinguishing mercy, both to the Christian Church at large and to every individual believer. And thus God speaks by another prophet,² "I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah; and ye were as a firebrand plucked out of the burning." And the Apostle Jude³ bids us "save others with fear, pulling them out of the fire." Each of us is as a brand plucked out of the fire; and it is owing to the distinguishing mercy of God that we were not left in the guilt of original sin, or that such of as have deeply stained our baptismal purity were not left to perish in our sins. How many who seemed perhaps less guilty than ourselves, have been cut off; while we have hitherto been spared! And which of us does not bear the scars of those wounds which we have received while doing the deeds of Satan?

It is an unspeakable comfort to believe that the purpose of God in thus plucking us out of the fire by his sovereign mercy, was not that we should be cast away at last; but that we should be created anew in true holiness, and fitted for the noblest service.

¹ Judg. xiii. 23.

² Amos iv. 11.

³ Jude 23.

Let us, however, "not be high-minded, but fear."¹ Too many defeat the gracious purpose of God by their miserable backslidings. Having been thus far saved from so great a danger, let us give the whole glory of our salvation to the grace of God; and fear those temptations, by which our wounds have been received. Nor can we truly value our own escape, unless we obey the Apostle's injunction by trying to save others with fear, pulling them out of the fire, before it be too late for them to share our deliverance.

XXX.—THE SINGLE EYE.

"The light of the body is the eye. If, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light; but if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If, therefore, the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" Matt. vi. 22, 23.—See also Deut. xvi. 19. Matt. xiii. 15; xx. 15. Mark vii. 22. 2 Tim. i. 3. Tit. i. 15. 1 John iii. 20, 21.

THE eye is that organ by which the soul perceives not only the light of the sun, which it is so pleasant to look upon, but all the wonderful works of God, by which the world is enriched and beautified. By the eye we guide ourselves in our various employments and movements. We form our judgment even of what is said to us, by observing whether it is spoken with the smile of playful tenderness, and whether the countenance bespeaks a serene integrity and virtue; or, whether the words are uttered with the lip of scorn, or the look of pride, or cunning, or any other evil temper. On the right and healthful condition of the eye depends, in great measure, the enjoyment which we derive from all that is fair around us; the skill which we are able to apply to our various pursuits; the correctness of our perceptions, both of the moral and material world. How little are we thankful for

¹ Rom. xi. 20.

this precious organ, while every moment it ministers to our pleasure and advantage ! They who are afflicted with the loss of sight know its full value ; and if the eye be even dimmed or clouded by any disorder of the body, we are at once made sensible how much our comfort depends on its being clear and “ single ; ” so as to convey to the mind a true and faithful picture of things around us.

The conscience is to the soul what the eye is to the body. It is the faculty by which we discern the difference between good and evil ; and by which we form our judgment, both as to the end at which we ought to aim, and as to the means by which we should pursue it. It is at once a witness and a judge within us ; and it fulfils its purpose when it shows us the glory of God, as the end to be set before us, and when it warns us to seek stedfastly and singly that blessed end in each particular action. But as the eye is affected by the diseased humours of the body, and then conveys to the mind only a dim and misty notion of outward things,¹ so the benefit to be derived from the conscience depends on the pains we take to keep it in a sound and healthful state. Men too often wish to silence its warnings, or perhaps to gain from it a different verdict and counsel from that which faithfulness demands. And they contrive to bribe it with some slight attention to its whispers, that it may not condemn them when they disregard its more solemn suggestions ; or they blind it with disingenuous reasonings and vain excuses. By such conduct they do, indeed, darken the eye of the soul, and put out the candle of the Lord within them.² They thus come to call evil good, and good evil ; to put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; to put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.³ By another figure of speech, they are said to “ sear the conscience as with a hot iron,” so that it is no longer sensitive and tender, but becomes dead and hard.

¹ Mark viii. 24.

² Prov. xx. 27.

³ Is. v. 20.

Well might our Saviour say of a soul that has thus obscured its power of spiritual discernment, "How great is its darkness!" And of these the prophet speaks when he says, "A deceived heart hath turned them aside, so that they cannot deliver themselves, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?"¹ Thus did St. Paul think that he "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth."² Thus did the Jews refuse to enter the hall of Pilate lest they should contract a ceremonial defilement, when they did not scruple to shed the innocent blood.

We should ever pray that God would both enlighten our conscience, and also strengthen its powers by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit. Our consciences will then be to us as the eye of God Himself; for He promises to guide us with His eye.³ We should ever rule ourselves by its godly motions, and beware lest it condemn us in the things which we allow.⁴

It has been well said, that as the eye cannot bear in itself the very least speck of dust, and knows no rest until it has wept it out; so the conscience should be sensitive to the very least stain or spot of sin, and not suffer us to be at peace until we have washed it out with the tears of penitence; or rather, until it be taken away by the blood of Christ. If we feel duly the importance of keeping this eye of the soul clear and true, we shall often pray, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."⁵

XXXI.—THE LILIES OF THE FIELD.

"And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which

¹ Is. xliv. 20.

² Acts xxvi. 9.

³ Ps. xxxii. 8.

⁴ Rom. xiv. 22.

⁵ Ps. cxxxix. 23, 24.

to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?" Matt. vi. 28—30.—See also Gen. xxii. 14. Luke viii. 14. 1 Cor. vii. 32. Phil. iv. 19.

Who can see the lilies of the field, and not remember that their simple beauty drew on them their Creator's approving notice, when in the days of His flesh He went in and out among us, and was Himself capable of being soothed by the works which He made so fair and pleasant for the children of men? Those sweet and lovely flowers were then as unreprovable in His sight as in the day when He first "saw that they were good." Man, for whose delight and solace they were made, was now sinful and fallen; but the handiwork of God in these, His humbler creatures, was still such as He could behold with complacency.

May we not picture them to ourselves as rejoicing according to the condition of their being, when He who made them had such respect unto them; and when, by His Divine word, He consecrated them into emblems or lessons of whatever is lowly and trustful, unto all generations? They bespeak to us the profuse bounty and the continual providence of Almighty God. Frail as they are, and short-lived, to-day blooming in the field, and to-morrow cast into the oven, they are yet arrayed out of God's unexhausted treasury in robes with which the brightest products of human art cannot vie in beauty and in glory.

"They toil not, neither do they spin:" the bright clothing, which it is so pleasant to behold, is furnished for them without any task imposed on them of painful labour; and they close their flowers at night without any anxious care lest the kindly shower or the genial sun should fail them on the morrow.

Our Saviour does not mean to discourage the toils of honest industry and wise foresight, or obedience to the law which is laid on all of us, "Six days shalt thou labour:" but He means that in these innocent "flowers of the field," we should see an emblem of those who are "without carefulness;" and who

having diligently done "whatever their hands find to do," are enabled to trust God for the result, with a sure trust that what they need on the morrow will be provided on the morrow. From the Divine bounty, and the orderly design shown in the provision made for the beauty and welfare even of such creatures as exist but for a day, they infer the wisdom and goodness which are employed for those who are created for an everlasting worship in heaven. They are thus able to "cast their burden on the Lord."¹ The spring with which the soul rises to "things above," as unto its true region, is not deadened by a weight of earthly cares;² nor are their prayers hindered and distracted by an inroad of pressing anxieties. They know in whom they have believed;³ and that in every temporal sorrow or suffering He is still concerned to comfort and uphold them; even the same gracious Father who provided for their eternal salvation by the gift of his beloved Son.

XXXII.—THE FOWLS OF THE AIR.

"Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?" Matt. vi. 25, 26.

THE same lesson which the lilies of the field teach us in every quiet nook and sunny meadow, is suggested by the fowls of the air as they fly over our heads in the open firmament of heaven. "They neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns," yet the boundless mercy of the universal Parent fills them day by day with plenteousness.⁴ Each bird that darts across the sky in the full enjoyment of its innocent being suggests to us a lesson of happy dependence on a wise

¹ Ps. lv. 22.

² 2 Tim. i. 12.

³ Heb. xii. 1.

⁴ Ps. cxlv. 16.

and merciful Providence. Why are our hearts so backward to be taught this lesson, which is continually proclaimed to us by these living and rejoicing witnesses? "Are we not much better than they?" Will He who supplies their continual wants, fail to remember us in our time of need? Let us shame ourselves out of our poor distrust, and those pining cares which eat out the very heart of religious joy and peace; fulfil diligently the daily duties of our calling, and depend with simple and affectionate trust on an all-wise and all-merciful Providence.

XXXIII.—THE HEATH IN THE DESERT.

"Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited." Jer. xvii. 5, 6.—See also Isa. i. 30. Luke viii. 6.

As the tree planted by the water side¹ is an emblem of the true servant of God, so the heath in the desert represents to us the miserable state of him who trusts in an arm of flesh, and in his heart departeth from the Lord. There is a stunted and dwarfish character even in the better points of his conduct, as if no true virtue could thrive in his soul.

Whatever be the season, the heath that grows in a salt land, or in the parched places of the wilderness, has always the same blighted and withered appearance; and thus, if a man is leaning for support on an arm of flesh, he can receive no true benefit from the best and highest privileges of God's Church. God ever sends leanness into his soul.² He finds one false prop fail him after another; and when at last he

¹ Jer. xvii. 8.

² Ps. cvi. 15.

sees the vanity of such miserable dependence, he has no Almighty arm to lean upon.

Give me grace, O Lord, to renounce from my heart all dependence on any thing but on Thy protecting mercy. Whether I be inclined to say "to the fine gold, thou art my confidence,"¹ or to trust for happiness to the ties of kindred and affection, or to intellectual pleasures, or to a self-righteous conceit; teach me to abhor all such unfaithfulness, and in Thee only, and in Thy mercy, through Jesus Christ, to seek for rest and contentment.

XXXIV.—THE TWO BUILDERS.

" Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the wind blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." Matt. vii. 24—27.

I MARKED a house standing on the soft sandy cliff, on which the sea is continually making inroads. Already vast portions of the headlands, with the buildings that were upon them, have been washed away; and it is plain that the remaining mansion, however stately and strongly built, must soon follow. How much labour has been spent in vain! How unwise was the builder who raised so costly a structure on so unsafe a site! How grievous that what is so fair in appearance should be so insecure in reality!

You may have often seen a far poorer structure set upon some rocky crag, that beats back the surges which break themselves upon it, and where it has for

¹ Job xxxi. 24.

ages defied "the stormy wind and tempest." The builder knew what he was doing, when he built it on a rock. He wanted it to last for ages, and to stand the utmost violence of the elements; and he chose a foundation which no force of winds or waves could undermine. As years pass by, the building seems only to become more like the rock on which it stands.

By the image of a house built upon the sand, our Lord has set forth to us the case of one "who heareth the word of God and doeth it not;" that is, who does not fully, heartily, and unreservedly endeavour to fulfil it. He may make a fair profession, and the house which, so to say, he builds, may seem to spectators as strong as other dwellings. They do not know that it is built upon the sand, and that the flood will come, and the waves will wash it away, and its place will nowhere be found. So utterly vain is profession without principle, and the outward appearance of religion without the inward reality. An apostle has told us, "If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain."¹ And what is here said of sins of the tongue, is equally true of any other cherished lust or evil practice wilfully continued.

And by the image of a house that is built upon the rock, and therefore can defy the violent flood and the driving storm, our Lord has shown us the happiness and security of one "who heareth the word of God and doeth it." He may perhaps seem outwardly less forward and zealous than the other, but he has an inward strength, which is not known to those who look only on the outward appearance. His "life is hid with Christ in God."² His care is not to seem religious, but to be religious; he hears in order to obey: whether the duty to which he is called be agreeable to his liking or not, whether it exposes him to

¹ James i. 26.

² Col. iii. 3.

loss, or shame, or suffering, he has still one thought and purpose: " Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth;"¹ " Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"²

A day is coming, which will assuredly prove on what foundation we have built our house; in other words, whether we have been hearers only, or doers, as well as hearers of the word; whether we have been truly or only seemingly religious. Our deeds are at best imperfect; but if done with a sincere and faithful heart God will accept them, through the mediation of our blessed Saviour; and the flood that will sweep away the hypocrite and the formal professor, will leave us uninjured, and monuments for ever of His saving mercy.

XXXV.—THE SURE FOUNDATION.

" According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master-builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every one take heed how he buildeth thereon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is." 1 Cor. iii. 10—13. See also Isa. xxviii. 16. Eph. ii. 20. 1 Pet. ii. 4—6.

IN the last similitude our Lord teaches us, by comparing in time of danger a house built on the sand with one that is founded on the rock, the difference between profession without practice, and a profession that is carried out into holy obedience. But He does not mean that we may build our hopes for eternity on the foundation of our own imperfect obedience, however conscious of sincerely rendering it. The merits of our blessed Lord Himself are the only foundation on which a sinner must build his hopes of pardon and

¹ 1 Sam. iii. 9.

² Acts ix. 6.

acceptance. "As a wise master-builder," says the apostle, "I have laid the foundation;" and "other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." No other foundation but this will bear the weight that is laid upon it—the hopes of forgiveness of all our sins, and of being now made holy, and of being hereafter accepted in the great day of account. Any other foundation would fail to support us with the burden of our sins on that day.

And as the merits of Christ are the foundation on which a Christian builds his hopes, so his works of faith and obedience are the superstructure that is raised upon it. But here also there is a great difference; for the superstructure that is raised by some may be likened to gold, silver, and precious stones; whereas what others build is like wood, hay, stubble. And there will be a trial, "as by fire," to try of what kind has been the work thus raised. Too many, from lukewarmness, or prejudice, or ignorance, produce such works as may be likened to rubbish, rather than precious stones. These will suffer loss in heaven, even if they lose not heaven itself. The fire will consume their works, instead of purifying them. Though perhaps in the main sincere, they will deeply mourn that they were not careful to raise a nobler superstructure to the glory of God their Saviour.

We are taught that God accounts the faithful services of His people as gold and silver and precious stones; and so we read¹ that the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit is of great price in His sight. These works of faith and labours of love will stand the fire, and will appear to be the genuine ore, or (by another figure) the true fruits of His Holy Spirit.

Our care must be no less to build such a superstructure as may be precious and acceptable in His sight, than to rest our hopes upon the true Foundation. Christ is "the Rock of ages," as well as "the

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 4.

tried stone" and "the sure foundation." On Him we must indeed rest our hopes, acknowledging the iniquity which cleaves even to our holiest things. But while thus resting singly upon Him, we must labour earnestly that our daily actions may be as gold or precious stones in His sight; and that we ourselves be thus daily less unworthy of the great blessing of being built as living stones in the spiritual temple.

XXXVI.—THE BOUNDLESS SEA.

"The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Isa. xi. 9.—See also Numb. xxiv. 7. Ps. xcvi. 11. Rev. xiv. 2.

As we look forth upon the boundless sea, and listen to the roar of its waves as they break upon the rocky shore, let us reflect on those glorious truths which God has for ever connected with what is thus sublime in nature. The future prevalence of our most holy faith is compared to the boundlessness of the sea; and the united worship that shall ascend to God from His triumphant Church is likened to the sound of its many waters.

How many shores are washed by that undivided ocean! As we watch its distant billows rolling onwards in an endless succession, we imagine to ourselves the coasts from which the ebbing tide has borne them to our own, and then remember that they are parts of one mighty ocean, which, under various names, encircles the round world. The sound also to which we listen is the echo, or rather the continuous utterance of that voice of the great deep which is heard on many a sunny isle far away, and on many an ancient steep. Each way we have ideas suggested to us of unity, vastness, and continuance.

And as the waters thus cover the sea, so shall the

earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God. The Divine truth once spoken by Christ and His apostles has rolled onwards to our remote age and distant land; and it shall still continue to flow forward from age to age, and from shore to shore, until the end of time. Even now it is a blessed and sublime employment for the thoughts on the return of God's own day, to remember what multitudes (as countless as yonder waves) are engaged in all parts of the world in the same work of praise and adoration; how the law proclaimed on Sinai is re-echoed from ten thousand altars in our own happy land, which at our Saviour's birth was debased by the darkest superstition; and how "the faith once delivered to the saints" is confessed in every quarter of the world! And as we believe that this will be far more realized, so we know also that, "as the sound of many waters," there shall hereafter be heard one song in heaven; "Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad, and rejoice, and give honour to Him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." "Let the sea roar," said the psalmist, "and the fulness thereof." The voice of these countless waters ascending up to God as in one universal chorus, is the emblem of that heavenly worship for which Almighty God created us, and for which the services of His earthly courts are a continual preparation. How shall we be fit for that heavenly worship, if we love not His earthly service, and if we are careless whether or not it be shared by all our fellow-creatures?

But if it be so blessed, even here below, to join with the great congregation in the work of prayer and praise, when voice joins with voice and heart with heart, and the feelings of the whole assembly swell upwards in one sacred hymn, what will it be in those heavenly courts, where the melody of the heart will be without one jarring note, and the adoration of God will be unmixed with one unworthy thought or feeling?

Still let our feet be duly found in God's earthly courts. Still let us strive to spread abroad in all lands the knowledge of the crucified Redeemer; and pray that that knowledge may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

XXXVII.—THE TROUBLED SEA.

“The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.” Isa. lvii. 20, 21.—See also Jude 13.

THE sea in its boundless unity, and in the countless-ness of its waves, is an image of the glory of the Church, and the prevalence of true religion in all parts of the world. But when we see a tempestuous sea, which cannot rest, “whose waters cast up mire and dirt,” we have before us a scriptural similitude of the wicked. “There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.”

As the blessedness of heaven is often called “rest,” and is spoken of as “a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb;”¹ so the wicked are said to be “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame.” The restlessness of a stormy sea which casts up only mire and dirt upon the shore, is inexpressibly painful to such as long for the green fields and peaceful valleys of some quiet home. And thus intolerable is the tumult in the heart of every wicked man, from the strife of ungoverned lusts and passions, and from the reproaches of conscience, which sooner or later make themselves heard. See how pride and envy disturbed Haman in the midst of his greatness;² or think of Ahab restlessly tossing on his royal couch, because he coveted Naboth’s vineyard;³ or consider

¹ Rev. xxii. 1.

² Esth. v. 11—13.

³ 1 Kings xxi. 4.

the dismay of Joseph's brethren at the first reverse which came upon them, and the terrible accusations of conscience which it served to awaken against them ;¹ and you have before you what, sooner or later, will be the state of every heart not subdued to the obedience of faith. Such a heart casts up only what is evil and defiling ; and there is a hell in it already, even without the infliction of positive punishment. What torment can be conceived more fearful than a perpetual gnawing of ungoverned and unsatisfied passions in a heart that is for ever given up only to the accusations of conscience ?

Let not my soul be like the dark and turbid waves, which we see indeed to be laden with dirt and mire, but of which we cannot see the bottom ! Let it be clear and still. Grant me, O Lord, the peace of regulated desires and mastered passions ; even that peace, of which it is written, "Great peace have they which love Thy law, and nothing shall offend them."²

XXXVIII.—THE SOLEMN JUDGMENT-SEAT.

"We shall all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ." Rom. xiv. 10.—See also Matt. v. 25. Acts x. 42. 2 Tim. iv. 1.

WHEN I see the solemnities of a court of judgment, or hear of some searching trial, by which the guilt of a criminal is brought to light, and the majesty of the law is vindicated by a dreadful sentence ; give me grace, O Lord, to reflect on that tremendous day when I shall stand before Thee to be judged with respect to all that I have said, or thought, or done, in the time of this mortal life. I read in Thy holy word,³ that the holy apostle, in the vision vouchsafed to him, saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, before whose face the earth and the heaven fled away.

¹ Gen. xlvi. 21.

² Ps. cxix. 165.

³ Rev. xx. 11.

And he saw the dead, small and great, stand before God ; and the books were opened ; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it ; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them. And they were judged every man according to his works, And whosoever was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire.

How truly can I use the words of that prophet, who is a warning against the sins of covetousness and unfaithfulness, "Alas ! who shall live when God doeth this?"¹ or those words of the holy Malachi, "Who may abide the day of His coming, or who shall stand when He appeareth?"² Thy word declares to me,³ that Thou hast set all my secret sins in the light of Thy countenance ; and my conscience tells me, that I cannot answer Thee one charge of a thousand.⁴ All poor excuses, and vain prevarications, and self-deceiving pleas, whether for retaining what Thou hast commanded me to renounce, or for neglecting what Thou hast commanded me to perform, will then be swept away, and I shall stand forth before men and angels to undergo the searching trial. Those books, out of which I shall be judged, will be an infallible proof ; and the secret sins which I may perhaps long since have forgotten, will all be set in order before me.⁵

Thou hast been pleased of Thy sovereign mercy to write my name in the book of life. O grant that it be not blotted out by all my manifold transgressions. Blot out the record of my sins in those awful books with my Saviour's precious blood, and let them not be brought before me on that day. May I henceforth live under the continual influence of what Thou hast made known to me concerning things to come : and as Thou hast taught me that Thou wilt

: ¹ Numb. xxiv. 23.

² Mal. iii. 2.

³ Ps. xc. 8.

⁴ Job ix. 3.

⁵ Ps. l. 21.

part the righteous from the wicked,¹ as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats, grant that I may be delivered from the extreme malediction which shall light on those who shall be set on the left hand; and that I may be set on the right hand, and receive Thy gracious benediction, commanding me to take possession of Thy glorious Kingdom. Grant this, for Thine infinite mercy, through Jesus Christ. *Amen.*

XXXIX.—THE PATH OF OUR FEET.

“Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.”
Prov. iv. 26.—See also Ps. xvii. 4. Prov. iii. 17. Jer. vi. 16.
Matt. vii. 13, 14.

A **LIFE** of virtue and religion is likened to a path in Holy Scripture, to remind us that if we would come to the right end, we must not live according to our own devices and fancies, but must frame our conduct by the rules and precepts which are laid down or marked out for us in the word of God. There is, as it were, a prescribed way to the right end, and no other will bring us to it. And as our inclinations, which are naturally bad, make it hard for us at first to follow these rules and precepts, we are said to enter into life by a “strait gate.” It is hard at first to find, and difficult to walk in; and we must all meet with many crosses and obstacles in pursuing it. A life of holiness does not gratify our sensual passions, nor give free scope to our carnal will, and is therefore unpleasing to flesh and blood: nor can we take it without keeping under the flesh, with its affections and lusts,² and bringing it into subjection.

This way of life goes straight to the eternal city; it does not allow of deviations for the sake of what seems pleasant on the right hand or the left; but the rule

¹ Matt. xxv.

² 1 Cor. ix. 27. Gal. v. 24.

is, “Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor the left: remove thy foot from evil.”¹

A life of irreligion and carnal pleasure, on the other hand, is called “a broad way,” because there is no difficulty in finding it; and men easily walk in it, by the mere rule of choosing what is tempting at the moment, and giving scope to their natural feelings and inclinations. It calls for no sacrifices; it imposes no necessity of bridling the tongue, or curbing the passions, or resisting the various temptations to ease and indulgence. And though indeed it leads to destruction, yet by far the greater number are found upon it, because they think it pleasant for the time, and hope that by some means or other it will lead them right at last. They find, however, by degrees, that what seemed easy at first, becomes hard and miserable as they go on. “The way of transgressors is hard.”² Though at first it seemed soft and easy, it becomes as irksome and wearying as a hard way to a traveller. Disappointment and vexation meet them at every step; a cheerless gloom surrounds them, and threatening shadows rest upon the path before them. They find too late and too truly that it leadeth to destruction.

Far different is it with the way of duty and obedience. Though difficult indeed to find, and hard at first to walk in, it becomes more large and easy³ as we advance; so that we are able not only to walk with ease, but even to run with liberty in the way of God’s commandments.⁴ “At the first,” says the son of Sirach, of heavenly wisdom,⁵ “she will walk with a man in crooked ways, and bring fear and dread upon him, and torment him with her discipline; until she may trust his soul, and try him

¹ Prov. iv. 25—27.

⁴ Ps. cxix. 32, 45.

² Prov. xiii. 15.

⁵ Ecclus. iv. 17.

³ Ps. xviii. 36.

with her laws. Then will she return the straight way to him, and comfort him, and show him her secrets.” Use renders easy and delightful what is hard to those who are unaccustomed to it; and though there be few indeed who walk in these ways of wisdom and virtue, yet they cheer and support one another with mutual help; and the end is life eternal.

Let us pray with the psalmist, “Teach me Thy way, O Lord; I will walk in Thy truth: unite my heart to fear Thy name.”¹ If, in looking back, we see too plainly that we have moved in a winding and devious line, let us often say, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse Thou me from secret faults.”² Accustom yourself early to self-denial and obedience, and be not dismayed if it seems hard at the beginning. You will find how faithful is the answer to that natural inquiry, “Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word.”³

XL.—CHRIST IS THE WAY.

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” John xiv. 6.—See also Isa. xxxv. 8, 9. John x. 9. Eph. iii. 18. Heb. x. 19, 20.

OUR blessed Saviour is called “the Way,” (and in another scripture “the Door,”) because it is by Him alone that sinful men obtain an entrance into heaven. The veil that was hung before the Holy of Holies,⁴ and which none might pass through but the high-priest once a-year, signified to us, that there was no way to heaven under the law. “By the law is the knowledge of sin,”⁵ not the means of deliverance from the power or punishment of sin. And by the rending of the veil at the time of our Saviour’s death,⁶ it appears to have been signified that a way was henceforth opened

¹ Ps. lxxvi. 11.

² Ps. xix. 12.

³ Ps. cxix. 9.

⁴ Heb. ix. 7, 8.

⁵ Rom. iii. 20.

⁶ Matt. xxvii. 51.

to the penitent unto life eternal, even by the blood of Jesus Christ. Thus we are taught that “no man cometh unto the Father” but by the one great Mediator. And we are exhorted to have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus; by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh.

Let us then renounce from our very hearts all trust and dependence on our own merits, or on any outward forms and observances, as if they were in any real sense the way of access unto God. Saying with the psalmist, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life,”¹ let us depend simply on the power of Christ to raise our bodies from the dead, as well as now to quicken our souls to the life of righteousness.

XLI.—THE THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

“Watch, therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the good man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.” Matt. xxiv. 42—44.—See also 1 Thess. v. 2 Pet. iii. 10. Rev. iii. 3; xvi. 15.

THAT grace which bringeth good out of evil, has caused a lesson of holy admonition to spring even out of the craft of such as break God’s law for the sake of dishonest gain. A thief gives no notice when he will come, but awaits the hour when we are least on our guard, and when the world is buried in sleep. If the householder knew at what hour the thief would come, he would watch, and would not suffer him to break open his house.² He who has reason to expect some secret plunderer, but cannot tell whether he will come at the beginning, or in the middle, or at the end of the night, stands continually on the watch, that he may not be taken by surprise.

¹ Ps. xvi. 11.

² Luke xii. 39.

And thus has my gracious Saviour reminded me that I should always be on the watch, and hold myself ready for His coming. I know that He will surely come, and know not the hour when He cometh. I know also that my time must come to die, and know not how soon the day of my death may overtake me. How fearful is the thought of being taken by surprise, and of being found unprepared for the one event or the other! my sins unrepented of; my heart unsanctified; my Saviour unsought; no treasure laid up in heaven; no progress made in the work which God has given me to do on earth! How unspeakably foolish were those virgins who, having no oil in their lamps,¹ gave way to slumber before they were provided with what they would need at the Bridegroom's coming!

Let me watch lest that cry should take me by surprise, "Behold, the Bridegroom cometh!" and lest I should see his train pass by in joyful readiness, and with the voice of joy and melody, while I should be hindered from joining it for ever. Let me watch against sloth, and surfeiting, and carnal security, and all the temptations of the evil one. Let me watch over my heart and conscience, over my tongue, and over all my ways. Let me watch for opportunities of doing and receiving good; for the coming of Christ and the day of judgment. In time of affliction let me watch that I be not discontented, but may improve the chastisement to the purposes for which it is sent; and in time of prosperity, that I be not lifted up with pride, nor trust in uncertain riches. In every duty let me watch, that it be done faithfully and heartily, as if it were the very last work which I had to do; and in time of recreation and ease, that I may not be drawn aside from duty by the love of pleasure. Still let me remember my Saviour's solemn word, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and

¹ Matt. xxv.

keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame."

XLII.—THE REFLECTION FROM THE WATER.

"As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man."
Prov. xxvii. 19.—See also Acts xv. 9. Rom. iii. 22—30.

THERE is not a ripple on the bosom of yonder lake. It is like a sheet of the purest and clearest glass, and reflects as faithfully as a mirror the surrounding hills and forests. The rocky mountain is seen on the unruffled water, with all its various hues of lichen, moss, and foliage, and with every shadow that is cast either by the passing clouds, or by such projecting crags as catch more brightly the rays of the declining sun. The vessels that are moored along the shore are pencilled with faultless exactness on the bosom of the lake; and we see the cattle browsing on the tender shoots as clearly in the water, as when we watch them on the shore.

God has taught us that the heart of one man resembles the heart of another, as truly as the picture in the water resembles the surrounding scene. "As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." This does not mean that the tastes and principles of men are not in fact greatly modified by difference of age, character, education, or condition in life; but it means, that we may be greatly helped in the knowledge of our own hearts by witnessing the faults of others; and in ministering to the happiness of others, by observing what we ourselves want or wish for.

There is by nature in all hearts the same enmity against God;¹ the same love of present and sensual

¹ Rom. viii. 7, 8.

things ; the same disinclination to self-denial ; the same self-esteem and love of pre-eminence. In short, there are in all hearts the seeds of that same evil plant, which, if left to grow unchecked, will bear the bitter fruits of the various works of the flesh. All are by nature disposed to plume themselves upon their own fancied superiority, and are averse from the humbling doctrines of the Bible and spiritual religion.

And as all hearts are thus naturally alike, so also the great remedies which God has provided for our restoration are equally suitable to all. The atonement made by our blessed Saviour on the cross, is the ransom which is equally needed by every child of man ; and the effectual grace of God's Holy Spirit is as precisely the stay that is required by one heart as by another. All who are enlightened by God perceive the same blessedness and preciousness¹ in their Saviour's mediation ; all have a similar struggle² in contending against their old corruptions ; and while they all hunger and thirst after righteousness, they have the same conviction that it can be attained only by the help of Divine grace. All are led to prayer, and see the necessity of continual watchfulness and circumspection.

This fact is calculated to humble us, and keep us from fancying ourselves righteous, and despising others. When we see any fault in a brother, we should remember that the seeds of that very evil are in our own heart, and but for the grace of God would have sprung up in like manner. What ignorance of himself did Hazael show, when he exclaimed, " But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing ?" as if he was incapable of the crime which the prophet foretold that he would commit, and which within a few days he actually perpetrated.

The recollection that all hearts so greatly resemble each other, will help us also in our conduct towards

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 7.

² Gal. v. 17.

³ 2 Kings viii. 13.

others; for we shall ever remember, all are naturally desirous of sympathy; wounded by neglect and indifference; provoked by being thwarted or injured; gratified by kindness and respect; that all have the same spiritual wants, and that it is our duty to make known to all what is as absolutely necessary for their good as it is for our own. We shall also take pains to be gentle and considerate for the feelings and expectations of all, recollecting that we are commanded¹ to "honour all men;" and that the very humblest and meanest of our fellow-creatures have equally that capacity for joy or sorrow, equally a sense of the difference between kindness or unkindness, which we have ourselves.

XLIIL.—THE COMPASSIONATE VISITOR.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me." Rev. iii. 20.—See also Cant. v. 2. Luke xii. 36. John xiv. 23.

WE have here the image brought before us of some compassionate and condescending visitor, who seeks admission to the house of a poor or afflicted neighbour, with the gracious purpose of both ministering to his bodily wants, and cheering him in his loneliness by wise counsel and tender companionship. On this errand of mercy he approaches the door of the mourner or the destitute, and is willing even to "stand at the door and knock," when he finds that it is not at once thrown open to him. The perverseness which refuses to let him in, does not at once discourage or offend him; but he stands at the door with patient compassion, and continues to knock for entrance, repeating again and again the gracious purpose for which he comes.

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 17.

Can anything more show our gracious Saviour's compassion, than that He has represented his patient love under this similitude? Not only did He come down from heaven to seek and to save the lost, but He thus condescends to ask an entrance into every man's soul. He comes to us to give us comfort in our sorrows; to give us rest in our weariness; to provide us with the spiritual food which our souls require; and even to vouchsafe unto us His gracious presence, by the communion of His most blessed body and blood. Too many are so dead in trespasses and sins, that they do not even hear His voice, and are stupidly unconscious of His gracious efforts to obtain admission into their hearts. Others are, indeed, aware of His merciful purpose, but suffer themselves to be so over-powered by slumber, that they will not trouble themselves to rise and open the door.

Who would not expect that our Lord would be at once provoked by such stupid unconcern, and would desist from His gracious purpose? It is long, however, before He ceases to knock for admission at the door of the heart. He knocks by His word, which is like a sword¹ that pierces the soul, and carries conviction home to it; by His Spirit, which strives with the sinner's perverse and stubborn will; by every mercy and every judgment; by the persuasions of His ministers, the example of His saints, the punishments that overtake the wicked. What blindness and folly is it, for any to harden themselves against His condescending mercy!

But happy is the hour, when at length the sinner rouses himself from his carnal deadness, and with shame and sorrow opens to his gracious Lord that heart which has been closed against Him by pride, or prejudice, or sensuality. Then he is made to taste that the Lord is gracious,² and finds what love and patience he has continued to resist. He learns that

¹ Heb. iv. 12.

² 1 Pet. ii. 3.

in his Saviour's presence is the fulness of joy; and he fears, above all, to provoke Him to depart, by returning to any of those sins from which Christ came to save the world.

XLIV.—THE RETURNING SPRING.

"Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth." Ps. civ. 30.—See also Isa. xxxii. 14, 15.—Ezek. xxxvii. 9. 1 Cor. xv. 23.

WHAT a wonderful change have a few days produced in the face of the country! If any one had never seen the effect of spring, and knew this world only as it appears in winter, (which is the season of Nature's death,) how little could he expect the cheerful change which is taking place before our eyes, the resurrection, as it were, from its six months' sleep of all that is now bursting into a new birth around us! If such a one had seen the seeds which a few weeks ago were put into the ground, would he have thought that so wondrous an increase would spring from what seemed little more than withered leaves or worthless dust? Look, for instance, at those early flowers of the returning spring. The eye can perhaps discern but little difference in their seeds; and yet how various are the forms and colours, and the texture and pencilling of every delicate leaf, in all the bright garland! If we had never seen the change before, should we not have found it difficult to believe that a secret power, so wonderful in its effects, was hidden in what seemed so mean, and what was committed to the earth, as if only to decay and mingle with the dust? How almighty is the wisdom which gave to each little seed its own law and properties, and which thus by a perpetual renovation clothes the earth again and again with its varied produce, quickening into a new life what seemed to have become as dry and sapless as the very clods of the valley.

It was thus that the moral world, which consists of the souls of men, was one vast wilderness in the sight of God, with no signs of spiritual life; and the holy angels waited with awe and reverence to see whether that power, which called it into being at first, would ever be put forth to create it anew, so as to renew in it that "beauty of the Lord their God" in which it was made at first. At length the Spirit was poured upon it from on high, and the wilderness became a fruitful field, and the desert rejoiced and blossomed as the rose.¹ Instead of the thorn came up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier came up the myrtle-tree.² God sent forth His Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and old things passed away, and all things became new.³

And thus, also, by the same Spirit shall God quicken our mortal bodies; and as surely as the earth casts forth the various produce which now seems struggling within its womb, so shall it "cast out the dead" who are now contained in it. Thus does the prophet announce this glorious fact, comparing it with the yearly revival of the herbs of the field, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead."⁴ It shall no more be able to contain them, than it could hold within its gates "the Prince of life,"⁵ when He was "declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."⁶ He rose as "the first-fruits of them that slept;"⁷ the first instance of the victory over death, and the pledge of the coming harvest. And if it ever seem to us a trial of faith, that those bodies shall be raised again which have said "to corruption, Thou art my father; to the worm, Thou art my mother and my sister;"⁸ let us reflect on the instances which we are now beholding.

¹ Isa. xxxv. 1.

² Ibid. iv. 13.

³ 2 Cor. v. 17.

⁴ Isa. xxvi. 19.

⁵ Acts iii. 15.

⁶ Rom. i. 4.

⁷ 1 Cor. xv. 20.

⁸ Job xvii. 14.

of the revival of nature from her annual death by the all-quicken ing breath of the creating Spirit. It is the apostle's own refutation of the unbeliever's objection; "But some men will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body."¹ How sacred a character does it give to the very world on which we are placed, and with the dust of which we are ourselves to mingle, when we regard it as thus containing in its womb the seeds of immortality, and as being the vast cemetery (or sleeping-place) of all God's saints from the beginning! How comforting is the thought, when we commit the body of some departed brother to the dust, that we are thus committing it as seed, which shall spring up to a glorious life in due season! And how anxious should we be, that our souls may know the power of the first resurrection from the death of sin to the life of righteousness;² that so at the last day we may rise again to a joyful hope, with glorified bodies, and spirits perfectly cleansed from the defilements of sin!

XLV.—THE MIGHTY CONQUEROR.

"Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously, because of truth, and meekness, and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee." Pa. xlvi. 3—5.—See also Pa. lxviii. 18. Isa. lxiii. 1—6. Rev. vi. 2.

THE King went forth this morning from His palace to contend in battle with His enemies. He is now returning in triumph from the conflict. His garments

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 35—38.

² Phil. iii. 10. Rev. xx. 6.

are indeed stained with blood, and He has Himself been wounded by “the archers, who shot at Him and hated Him;”¹ “but His bow abode in strength, and the arms of His hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.” But His apparel is red also with the blood of His conquered enemies, who have fallen under His sword, and in whose heart His arrows have been sharp; and already the armour in which they trusted² is given to the flames; for the battle has been not only “with confused noise, and with garments rolled in blood,” but also “with burning and fuel of fire.”³ As signs of His victory, and tokens of a reign of peace, “He breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in fire.”⁴

This mighty Conqueror is the Lord Jesus Christ; the enemies with whom He has contended are the powers of darkness,—the enemies of God and of His Church,—sin, death, and Satan; the cause for which He has endured the utmost of their enmity against Him, is the cause of truth, of meekness, and righteousness; the establishment of His kingdom of peace, and justice, and joy in the Holy Ghost.⁵ It was to scatter the proud in the imagination of their hearts; to put down the mighty from their seat, and to exalt the humble and meek.⁶ The sword with which He has smitten these enemies is His word, which is said to be “quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;”⁷ and is represented by St. John as “a sharp two-edged sword, proceeding out of His mouth.”⁸ He was alone in the fearful conflict; and of the people there were none with Him. In His hands and feet He has the wounds which those cruel foes were able to inflict; on His forehead, which was gored with thorns, and in His side, which was pierced with a spear. Who shall tell the greatness of that

¹ Gen. xlix. 23, 24.

² Luke xi. 22.

³ Is. ix. 5.

⁴ Ps. xlvii. 9.

⁵ Rom. xiv. 17.

⁶ Luke i. 51, 52.

⁷ Heb. iv. 12.

⁸ Rev. i. 16.

agony,¹ when He wrestled in prayer so earnestly that His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground? or when, upon the cross, He cried, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" But through death He destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."² Having been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin,³ at length, even upon the cross, He spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it;⁴ and by His glorious resurrection and ascension He has led captivity captive. He is thus represented "as making His progress among the nations, seated on His triumphal chariot, adorned with all the regal virtues; and, by the irresistible might of His power, subduing iniquity and idolatry to the faith and temper of the Gospel."⁵

Reign, O Lord, I beseech Thee, in my heart; and grant that being made "willing in the day of Thy power,"⁶ I may be a true and faithful subject of Thy kingdom of meekness, truth, and righteousness. Subdue in me whatever is contrary to Thy blessed will; and dispose me to give myself up unreservedly to Thy service, which is perfect freedom. And may that blessed kingdom extend itself in all lands, and over every heart. Thou hast received the utmost parts of the earth for Thine inheritance; and Thou shalt bruise with a rod of iron all those who resist Thy will, and "shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."⁷ Let me not be found among those who shall thus at last be monuments of Thy Almighty power; but now and ever let me be numbered with the willing subjects of Thy grace.

¹ Luke xxii. 44.

² Heb. ii. 14.

³ Ibid. iv. 15.

⁴ Col. ii. 15.

⁵ See Bishop Horne on Ps. xlv.

⁶ Ps. cx. 3.

⁷ Ibid. ii. 9.

XLVI.—THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER.

“Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life ; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.” 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4.—See also Josh. v. 14. Ps. lxxviii. 9. Ephes. vi. 11—17. 2 Tim. iv. 7.

ALTHOUGH the passage here quoted from St. Paul’s Second Epistle to Timothy has an especial reference to a minister of Christ, the words may well be applied to the case of Christ’s disciples in general. Now we know that the disciple should think it enough to be as his master, and the servant as his lord.¹ If our blessed Master be “the Captain of the Lord’s host,” “a leader and commander to the people;”² His followers are as soldiers who fight under His command and guidance, against the enemies of their salvation.

It is here implied that our life ought not to be a life of ease, and softness, and self-pleasing ; and also, that it is no easy task to gain the crown of eternal life. It is a soldier’s business to please him who has chosen him to that honour and service ; and he therefore abstains from entangling himself in the common concerns and affairs of life, in order that he may be always ready for any enterprise on which his commander may send him, however difficult or hazardous. He must not shrink from enduring hardness, cold and heat, hunger and thirst, labour and watchings. He must not shrink from peril of life or limb. He must not choose for himself the post which he would prefer, but cheerfully occupy that which is chosen or appointed for him.

We are thus taught how little they know the nature of their calling, who think that they need live by no other rule than that of their own liking. The prize of our heavenly calling will not fall into our hands,

¹ Matt. x. 25.

² Isa. lv. 4.

unless we strive for it, as a soldier for the victory. If we rise, day after day, to forward only our worldly interest, or amuse ourselves as best we can ; we are in no sense soldiers of Jesus Christ. We should ever remember that we have enemies to contend with; the world, the flesh, and the devil; and that we can never contend successfully, unless we are watchful against the secret snares as well as the open assaults by which they seek to entangle and destroy us. Alone or in company, in joy or sorrow, in business or recreation, we have still need to be on our guard ; for our enemies plan their attacks according to the present condition of our souls, and ever direct their greatest force against our weakest points. The devil seeks to sift us as wheat is sifted ; and at one time he endeavours to puff us up with pride and conceit, at another to lower us to sloth and sensuality. He tempts us sometimes with the love of money ; at others, through the more malignant passions of envy, hatred, and uncharitableness : or he seeks to terrify us from duty by the fear of man ; to discourage us by suggesting to us hard thoughts of God ; or to prejudice us against the humbling truths of the gospel, by high notions of our own goodness. A Christian soldier is desired to take unto himself the whole armour of God, in order that he may stand against these manifold assaults. He is to have his loins girt about with truth ; and to cover himself with the breastplate of righteousness ; and to have his feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, he is to take the shield of faith, wherewith he may quench all the fiery darts of the wicked ; and the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And that he may have this armour always bright and serviceable, he must pray always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watch thereunto with all perseverance ; remembering ever, that it is not for one who girdeth on his harness to boast like one who

putteth it off;¹ and that it is God only who teacheth his hands to war, and his fingers to fight.²

Now we know that a soldier is not admitted into an army without taking an oath of duty and obedience to his commander; and thus, when Christ chooseth any one to be His soldier, the sign of the Cross is required upon his forehead, in token that he will manfully fight and faithfully serve; and he is required also in the sacrament of baptism, to "promise and vow" that he will indeed renounce all other allegiance, and walk in the ways of faith and obedience. The word "sacramentum," from which our word Sacrament is derived, meant, in the classic writers, the military oath which was taken by the Roman soldiers; and the vows which we first take on us in the sacrament of baptism, we are to renew continually in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is through these blessed channels of grace, that we receive strength to have victory and to triumph in the conflict to which we are engaged.

For as our blessed Master went forth "conquering and to conquer;" so will He give us the victory,³ by that strength which is made perfect in weakness.⁴ Out of the mouth of very babes and sucklings hath He ordained strength, to still the enemy and the avenger.⁵ Having Himself bruised the head of the serpent,⁶ He will shortly also bruise the same enemy under our feet.⁷ Our part must be, to conform ourselves to the rules of His heavenly warfare, by patience, humility, and meekness; still leaving it to Him to appoint our post, and to choose for us the services in which we are to labour; and endeavouring to "quit ourselves like men,"⁸ whether the work to which He calls us be one of patient suffer-

¹ 1 Kings xx. 11.

² Ps. cxliv. 1.

³ Rom. viii. 37.

⁴ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

⁵ Ps. viii. 2.

⁶ Gen. iii. 15.

⁷ Rom. xvi. 20.

⁸ 1 Sam. iv. 9. 1 Cor. xvi. 13.

ing, or of quiet obedience, or of more active and forward exertion.

XLVII.—THE HART DESIRING THE WATER BROOKS.

“ As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God : when shall I come and appear before God ? ” Ps. xlvi. 1, 2.—See also Ps. lxiii. 1. Ps. lxxxiv. John vii. 37.

THERE is a glen in yonder woods, through which a quiet brook winds its way among ferns and sedges. The trees on its opposite banks intermingle their branches ; and even in the summer noon the shadow is broken only by such flickering lights as find their way through a dense foliage to the bosom of the water.

The deer are accustomed to gather themselves at noon to that cool solitude and refreshing brook ; and are often seen reclining in groups upon the mossy bank, or quenching their thirst in the shallow stream. To-day, however, the hunters had scared them from their nook ; and were chasing a hart over the open brow above the woods, under the sultry sun. Panting with the heat and exertion, it was evidently making for its favourite haunt and the quiet brook. From some change of purpose, its pursuers discontinued the chase ; and the frightened and exhausted creature was suffered to plunge into the copses, and find its way to the shades for which it longed. How eager must have been its draught, when it reached the brook ! how grateful and refreshing the plunge into the flood, and the rest amidst the moss and fern !

When David would express the desires of his soul towards God, he likened them to the longing of a hart for the water brooks. “ Like as the hart desireth the water brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God : when shall I come to appear before the presence of God ? ” How eager must have been his desire, and

how earnest his affections; that no comparison but one taken from a need thus pressing, could suffice to express their intenseness! He was at this time probably driven from his kingdom by Absalom, and deprived therefore of the comfort of the Temple services. We see how deeply we should value the opportunities of public worship, and how much we should blame ourselves for the cold and formal manner in which we too often join in them. But we may see also in this beautiful similitude, the image of a true Christian, under the burden of the flesh and the weariness of this miserable world, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.¹ Looking evermore to God as the source of all good and happiness, he longs for the time when, through the merits of his Saviour Christ Jesus, he may be admitted to an everlasting communion with that inexhaustible fountain of wisdom and goodness. He feels that in this world he has no resting place; and knows that nothing which is in it can satisfy his desires.² His affections find their true object in God; and his hopes and desires fix themselves upon things above. Content indeed to stay on earth and serve God humbly, in the quiet duties of his calling, until the time shall come; he is still looking upward to his true home, and forward to the period when he shall at length be summoned to it. Meanwhile, the statutes of God are his songs in this house of his pilgrimage;³ and he is supported by the thought of that blessed day, when he shall drink evermore of the pleasures which are at God's right hand, and, as it were, renew his exhausted strength in the river of the water of life.

May God vouchsafe to bring us to that blessed place, "where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest;"⁴ and may he ever make us diligent to prepare for it; purifying our hearts by faith,⁵ and

¹ 2 Pet. iii. 12.² Ps. cxix. 54.⁴ Job iii. 17.³ Isa. lv. 2.⁵ Acts xv. 9.

enabling us to “set our affections on things above, not on things on earth!”¹

XLVIII.—THE FOUNTAIN OF LIVING WATERS.

“My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.” Jer. ii. 13.—See also Ps. xxxvi. 9. John iv. 14.

As water is one of the most essential requisites for life as well as health, it is continually applied in Holy Scripture to represent to us the necessity of divine grace; and thus a well or spring of water becomes an emblem of the eternal source of all spiritual blessings, and of salvation itself. The blood of our blessed Saviour, by which His people are washed from the defilements of sin, is called a Fountain opened to the house of David and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.² The quickening and refreshing influences of the Holy Spirit are in like manner compared by our Lord Himself to “rivers of living water;”³ and when God by the prophet Jeremiah declares Himself “a fountain of living waters,” we may understand that it is God the Father, who thus sets Himself forth to us as the source of all temporal and spiritual good.

The beauty and suitableness of this similitude would be more strikingly seen by the inhabitants of those parched and sandy countries, in which a well or fountain of water is prized in proportion to its scarcity, than by ourselves, who scarcely know what it is to feel the need of it; and therefore (as too often happens) are less sensible of its value. With what eager longing must the pilgrims over the desert look forward to their repose on the favoured spot, where a perpetual spring creates a little island of verdure in the midst of the burning plain! The image of such a well or

¹ Col. iii. 2.

² Zech. xiii. 1.

³ John vii. 38.

fountain must come across their minds with a train of happy and grateful thoughts, which it scarcely brings to ourselves: and when God likens himself to an unfailing fountain, they must see the truths implied by the similitude more clearly and fully than we are perhaps able to perceive them. It must at once suggest to them the thought that in God we live, and move, and have our being; that without him we must perish; that in His presence we have the fulness of joy; that in Him alone the weary can find rest, and the mourner comfort; and that the soul which thirsts for something that can truly satisfy its wants and desires, must seek it in God only.

As God is pleased to liken Himself to a fountain of living waters, so He compares those who seek happiness in any creature whatever to men, who having an unfailing spring of water at hand, should be foolish enough to turn away from it and hew out for themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water. This was the case of those who forsook the worship of the true and living God, for the service of idols; and it is the case with all who either think to find satisfaction on earth in earthly things, or who build their hopes of happiness hereafter on their own fancied merits or observance of the outward forms of religion. What folly would it be to depend for water on such a cistern as has been supposed, rather than on a perpetual fountain ever near at hand; and yet how slow are we to seek in God that rest and happiness, which we seek so eagerly in the endearments of this life, or in the gratification of our vain-glorious wish for human praise, or in the pursuit of pleasure, or in the possession of wealth! How many "broken cisterns" of this kind have we trusted to, as an unfailing source of joy and contentment; and when experience has shown in one instance the vanity of our trust, we have only turned as fondly and as blindly to hew us out another cistern of the same kind; as unable as the last to supply us in our time of need with the refresh-

ing and satisfying draught, on which we so eagerly counted ! And how unwilling are we also to acknowledge, that our very best and holiest deeds are in themselves so unworthy of the Divine favour, that we must depend to the very last for pardon and acceptance, on the merits only of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ !

“ And now (God said to his people of old) what hast thou to do in the way of Egypt, to drink the waters of Sihor ? or what hast thou to do in the way of Assyria, to drink the waters of the river ? ”¹ We cannot wonder that those who know no better, and who have never drunk of “ the waters of Shiloah that go softly,”² should be found in “ the way ” of this world’s vanities, trying to slake their thirst in those troubled and polluted waters. But what have we to do on that path which leads to disappointment and destruction ? We have been led early to that river which maketh glad the city of God ;³ and we are indeed most faithless, as well as thankless and foolish, if we are so unmindful of our high and happy calling as to forsake “ the fountain of living waters,” for any “ broken cistern ” whatever of earthly hopes, or carnal dependence.

XLIX.—THE LETTING OUT OF WATER.

“ The beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water : therefore leave off contention, before it be meddled with.” Prov. xvii. 14.

—See also Ps. xxxiv. 13. Prov. xv. 1. Matt. v. 5.

IT was but a narrow channel which was cut in the dam, to let out the waters from the reservoir ; yet how wide a breach have they already made ! While no vent was afforded them, they remained at rest ; and their pressure was not too much for the embankment which was raised to resist it ; but when the least opening was once made, they did not confine themselves to that narrow outlet ; but the issuing

¹ Jer. ii. 18.

² Isa. viii. 6.

³ Ps. xlvi. 4.

stream wore away speedily the sides of the channel ; and at length the rolling flood swept away with irresistible force, what it had required the labour of many months to raise.

Thus have I seen a tide of angry tempers roll forth, through the vent afforded by one hasty and ill-considered word. While the door of the lips was kept,¹ the soul was comparatively still, and it found little difficulty in keeping within due bounds the feelings that were excited by what had passed ; but when once they found vent in an angry expression, they gradually burst the bounds that were before sufficient to keep them in. The angry word was answered by a bitter taunt, and this again provoked another. New subjects of complaint and recrimination suggested themselves to the disputants, which they would never otherwise have thought of bringing forward ; and expressions were used on both sides which it might be difficult ever to forget. The friendship which had been the growth of years was weakened, if not destroyed, by a quarrel which neither party dreamt of when they first gave vent to their excited feelings.

Beware of thus letting out a tide which you may find it impossible to stop. You think that you will just say one word, and will then be able to cease from strife ; but it is far more easy to suppress that word, than it will be to "let go displeasure" when the word has once been spoken. Be afraid of wounding and perhaps losing a true friend, for the gratification of venting a peevish humour. Remember that it is said, "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife."² And again: "He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty ; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city."³ Frequently offer up the prayer, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and keep the door of my lips."

¹ Ps. cxli. 3.

² Prov. xx. 3.

³ Ibid. xvi. 32.

L.—THE GRADUAL DAWN.

“The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” Prov. iv. 18.—See also Ps. lxxxiv. 7. Zech. iv. 10. 2 Cor. iii. 18. Phil. ii. 15.

How gradual is the dawn of day, and how pleasant is it to watch the first signs of the returning light; and to observe the darkness melting into the grey twilight, and the first faint daybreak in the east by degrees becoming a bright and gorgeous tabernacle for the rising sun! The forms which were lately lost in one mass of shadow, now begin to separate themselves into distincter outlines; a grey colouring steals over the landscape that lay in darkness, and at length the various hues of the meadow and the woodland seem to greet the first rays of the approaching king, as he climbs above the horizon with so stately a tread.

It is already full daylight, but the mists still hang upon the distant hills, and we can trace the winding rivulet only by the dews that rise from it. Some hours will yet pass before all nature owns the ripening power of the meridian heat; but, though gradual, the progress of yon glorious orb is sure. “His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof.”¹ After having run his useful course, he will sink, as it were, to rest amidst the brightest tokens of a glorious morrow.

And such, my son, is the course of a true servant of our common Master. It begins with faint indications of the light that is dawning on his soul, and though beautiful and blessed even in its earliest brightness, it is not free from the mists of youthful hopes and vanities which sometimes threaten to obscure the promise of the dawn. But as prayer draws down from “the Father of lights” a larger

¹ Ps. xix. 6.

measure of His illuminating grace,¹ the mists by degrees disperse, and the shadows of ignorance and vanity are scattered before it. The Christian advances from grace to grace, and his course is marked by deeds of charity, self-denial, and mercy. His path shines more brightly as it may be traced by more abundant works of faith and labours of love; souls edified, sorrowing hearts comforted, wants supplied, fruits of holiness and peace already ripening on many a spot that was before a desert waste. And as along his useful course he “shines”² with a brightening holiness, and “burns” with a deeper zeal;³ so when his course is ended he sinks to rest, with the hope and tokens of a still more glorious “rising” in “the morning”⁴ of the resurrection.

Hear, then, the word which bids you “arise, and shine; for the light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.” Be not discouraged if at first the light is but faint, and if it be dimmed at times by the clinging mists of that darkness out of which you are called. Do not expect to “shine” at once like those who have long followed “the Sun of righteousness” along His bright and burning path. But be diligent in prayer, and in all useful and lowly duties. Be earnest in advancing further from the region of darkness, and in climbing the steep ascent of grace and virtue. Then it shall not fail but that the evening of your days (whether it come early or be long delayed) shall be brightened with the promise of a happy resurrection, even with a hope that is full of immortality.

¹ Heb. vi. 4. ² Isa. lx. 1. ³ John v. 35. ⁴ Ps. xlix. 14.

THE END.

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